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The Spirit as the Lord and the Giver of Life: Recovering Relational Pneumatology and Its Significance for Being Church in Postcolonial Nigeria

Okechukwu Njoku

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THE SPIRIT AS THE LORD AND THE GIVER OF LIFE: RECOVERING
RELATIONAL PNEUMATOLOGY AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE
FOR BEING CHURCH IN POSTCOLONIAL NIGERIA

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Art

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Okechukwu Camillus Njoku

May 2012

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Okechukwu Camillus Njoku

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RELATIONAL PNEUMATOLOGY AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE
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ABSTRACT

THE SPIRIT AS THE LORD AND THE GIVER OF LIFE: RECOVERING RELATIONAL PNEUMATOLOGY AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR BEING CHURCH IN POSTCOLONIAL NIGERIA

By

Okechukwu Camillus Njoku

May 2012

Dissertation supervised by Professor Gerald M. Boodoo

This dissertation seeks to recover the relational quality of the Holy Spirit who is the Lord and the Giver of life as enshrined in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (381). Neo-Scholastic theology had utilized the conceptual categories of Aristotelian metaphysics with its orientation to foundationalism and immobility in a manner destructive of difference, plurality, and the relational language of the Spirit as witnessed in the Bible. One of the upshots became the totalizing bent of Western epistemology which eventually found concretion in colonialism and the slavery of Africans among others. This dissertation utilizes the category of “relationality,” a core tenet of West African *Weltanschauungen*, as an organizing and interpretive device for reinterpreting the creedal affirmation in a way that allows for new understandings of the Spirit. In our

world in which there is an increasing awareness of the simultaneity of the dialectic of differences and interconnectedness due to the process of globalization, we are compelled to seek ways of living together without subordinating difference to the regime of sameness. The thesis is that relational pneumatology provides template for negotiating an other discourse on the Triune God which recognizes and respects equality-in-difference. To develop this thesis, I utilize an anthropological, interdisciplinary, critical, and descriptive approach. I argue that relational pneumatology invites that subalternized epistemic potentials be foregrounded and legitimized in a manner that fosters “solidarity of others.” I also draw the implications of this perspective for the Nigerian church with regard to ecclesial structures and authority, interreligious dialogue, and the question of holistic liberation that fosters justice and peace.

DEDICATION

To my beloved parents

Mr. Daniel N. Njoku and Mrs. Felicia D. Njoku

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In this dissertation, I utilize the concept of relationality—a core tenet of the Etche and most West African world-views—as its organizing interpretive framework, and which finds concrete expression in hospitality and friendship. God’s hospitality engenders friendship with God which cannot be separated from friendship with one’s fellow human beings amidst differences and ambiguities in our interdependent world.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AG	<i>Ad gentes divinitus</i> , Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity (Vatican II)
AMECEA	Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of East Africa
CBCN	Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria
CCB	Christian Community Bible
<i>Cf./cf.</i>	Confer (compare)
Ed./Eds.	Editor/Editors
et al.	<i>et alii/et alia</i> (and other persons)
etc.	et cetera
GS	<i>Gaudium et spes</i> , Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Vatican II)
Ibid.	<i>Ibidem</i> (the same reference)
i.e.	id est (that is)
KJV	King James Version (Bible)
LG	<i>Lumen Gentium</i> , Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Vatican II)
NA	<i>Nostra aetate</i> , Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Vatican II)
NAB	New American Bible
NAS	New American Standard (Bible)
NIV	New International Version (Bible)
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version (Bible)
PO	<i>Presbyterorum ordinis</i> , Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests (Vatican II)
RSV	Revised Standard Version (Bible)
SCCs	Small Christian Communities

SC	<i>Sacrosanctum Concilium</i> , The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Vatican II)
UR	<i>Unitatis redintegratio</i> , Decree on Ecumenism (Vatican II)
WCC	World Council of Churches

Introduction

0.1 The State of the Question

This dissertation is inspired firstly by my experience of how the question of difference has not too infrequently been used negatively as a tool for oppression, domination, and exclusion. The tragedy of colonialism and African slavery substantiate this view. How was it that in relating to the African other, Europeans saw Africans as less than human, a legacy which has continued to be perpetuated by neocolonial elites? Another, is the dominance of Spirit-experience in West African Christianity that invites an investigative and critical theological articulation. Currently, no theological work exists from an Etche-West African pneumatological perspective specifically with regard to the question of rearticulating difference for the purpose of a greater enrichment of the church and of humanity. This work, therefore, seeks to fill the gap. This dissertation attempts a reinterpretation of the Third Article of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan (381) creedal affirmation of the Holy Spirit as: “The Lord and the Giver of Life.” In order to do this, I draw on “relationality,” a core tenet of Etche (West African) cosmo-religious tradition, as an interpretive and organizing framework for this task. In connection with this interpretive tool, I seek to understand the Lord and Giver of life as the relational Spirit who not only creates our differences but also enriches same through communion.

In the making of the modernity/coloniality world system culminating in the phenomenon that has come to be known today as globalization, we are confronted with its ambivalence. Firstly, it pertains to the stark reality of fragmentation and of plurality stemming from an increased awareness of differences (in culture, religion, gender, class,

sex, ethnicity, and so on). Secondly, we come face to face with the reality of the interconnected and interdependent nature of the world. In this seemingly “antithetical dialectic of simultaneous differentiation and interdependence,”¹ we are compelled to find a way of negotiating the boundaries of difference in a non-totalizing manner. This unlocks the door to theologies in a World Church that would no longer be a matter of unidimensional consumerism of Western global designs but of a plurilateral and pluriversal collaboration. More precisely, this study seeks to understand “the reign of God” inaugurated and proclaimed by Jesus as good news to mean, among others, that those on the margins and the excluded have become part of the larger conversation.

Let me briefly historicize the modern/colonial world system² mentioned above in order to focus our understanding of the Etche/West African context that informs our task of reinterpreting the creedal appellation of the Holy Spirit. The Medieval synthesis and neo-Scholastic theistic theology had utilized Greek metaphysical and epistemological categories in talking about God-human relationship. But because Greek philosophy thinks in terms of substance and causality, God was conceived as the First Uncaused Cause in a series of chain of causes. God was seen through the prism of absolute foundation. And God’s relation to humans was understood in terms of an instrumental, mechanical, productionist causality of an impassible, immutable, and All-Perfect Being without any personal relationality.³ Hence, from the very beginning, Greek philosophy as

¹ Anselm K. Min, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World: A Postmodern Theology after Postmodernism* (New York and London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 1.

² For a detailed explication of the contours of modernity/coloniality world system, see below Chapter 4, sec. 4.5, of this work below.

³ See William J. Hill, *The Three-Personed God: The Trinity as a Mystery of Salvation* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 210.

the progenitor of Western epistemological thought has always been oriented to thinking in terms of foundations, *stasis*, absolutes, and thus, totality. It is this thinking in absolute, “delocalized and ahistorical” terms (if at all, there is such a thing) that would ground the epistemological production of the modern/colonial world system between the 16th and the late middle of the 20th centuries climaxing in global colonialism.

The 15th through the 18th centuries marked the consolidation of the modern/coloniality world system driven by capitalism and European frontier expansionism. This was facilitated through the “coloniality of power”⁴ and active colonialism which created peripheries all over the planet outside the metropolitan centers in Europe. Structurally, the modern system, created the inside borders (that is, inside modernity) and the outside borders (outside modernity). This “outside” of modernity is what decolonial thinkers have described as the “colonial difference.”⁵ In this connection, Eurocentric epistemologies emanating from the Greek legacy and refined as the Enlightenment instrumental, pure, objective, “zero-point” rationality, were invented, exported, and imposed on the populations classified as outside modernity as the only normative way of knowing. Those categorized in the region of the colonial difference were dislocated, their own local histories/epistemologies disdained and discredited as inadequate, unscientific, and irrational, and hence, they were forcefully taught to discard them. Besides, the populations inhabiting the outside of modernity along with their

⁴ The coloniality of power has been described as a “conflict of knowledges and structures of power.” See Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), 16. The clarification of the cluster of terms used here, such as: coloniality, colonial difference, global designs, pluriversal, and so on, can be found in Chapter 4, sec. 4.5.

⁵ Ibid., ix.

cultures and traditions were only of interest as objects (not subjects) of study and knowable only through the normative matrix of Eurocentric totalizing episteme. In this way, the epistemic potentials of the outside borders of modernity were subalternized and silenced philosophically, theologically, and otherwise. Worse still, because the populations in the outside of modernity were viewed as objects, some of them (such as Africans) were oppressed, repressed, and exploited through slavery. But even after the era of active colonialism and slavery, coloniality, sadly enough, is still alive and well in the form of global coloniality (socio-economically, politically, and even ecclesiastically) which continues to wield and structure the discourse of power and the modern totalizing project under the guise of universal (but only Eurocentric local knowledges) assumptions.

This work is therefore, a contribution to the endeavor in intellectual decolonization⁶ which entails an exploration in an “other paradigm” of thinking that is non-totalitarian. My thesis is that relational pneumatology provides a template for negotiating differences through the fostering of a “solidarity of others”⁷ that is respectful

⁶ See Chukwudum B. Okolo, *Toward Decolonizing the Church: An African Liberation Theology* (Onitsha, Nigeria: Tabansi Press, 1976); see also David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 448.

⁷ Throughout this work, I will maintain the expression “solidarity of others” rather than “solidarity with others.” My use of solidarity of others, an expression that, of course, is grammatically correct, is beholden to the insight of Anselm Min cited above. He makes a subtle distinction between the two expressions. Accordingly, the expression “solidarity with others” implies some underlying vantage point from which “we look at others as other and choose which others to enter into solidarity with. Furthermore, we tend to look at these others as victims needing...our assistance; we tend to be paternalistic.” Whereas solidarity of others “implies that there is no privileged perspective, that all are others to one another...and that all are subjects, not objects.” The word “Other” is to be understood in the Levinasian sense, and is used here in referring to human beings whose alterity forbid any reduction to the regime of sameness or totality. And sociologically, it refers to those who have actually been excluded, dislocated, subjugated, and subalternized through the “coloniality of power.” Solidarity of others, therefore, serves as a critique of the socio-political and religious structures that create subalternity as areas to be studied and subalterns as objects of study rather than to be seen and treated as subjects with equality-in-difference. Solidarity of others thus calls for

of equality-in-difference in a life-affirming way. The study aims to unsubject and foreground silenced African local knowledges/histories, and to legitimize the region as an authentic epistemic location with subjects who possess epistemic potentials that should no longer continue to be silenced. I argue in this work that African Christian theology, a branch of which is pneumatology, occupies the same local epistemic status as any European theologies (which are also local theologies). It should thus be recognized according to the framework of equality-in-difference. Besides, it is also an authentic contribution from a subaltern perspective which expands the dimensions of the gospel and enriches the living (not static) tradition of the church. Sometime ago, Aylward Shorter, echoing Jean-Marie Èla, underlined that “The church in Africa...may be growing in numbers, but it is not growing in awareness.”⁸ While there may be elements of truth to this statement, what it ignores to highlight is that since the era of Independence in most of Africa in the 1960s, there has continued to be an increasing awareness of the huge social changes taking place in Africa, of the efforts to contextualize and decolonize both ecclesial structures and theology. But then we are still existing in the modern/colonial world system in which coloniality of power is still alive and well.

0.2 The Scope and Methodology

The scope of this project is limited to a particular hermeneutical retrieval of the ancient appellation of the Spirit as the Lord and Giver of Life to articulate a relational pneumatology. My aim is to reinterpret this Third Article in a way that allows for new

many differences and many worlds living and fitting together in one world without reduction to sameness. See Ibid., 82.

⁸ See Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988), 247.

understandings of the Person of the Holy Spirit in the light of contemporary African situation. It is, therefore, not an exercise in rehearsing the old apologetics and polemics with regard to the procession of the Holy Spirit either from the Father alone (Monopatristism) or from the Father and the Son (Filioquism). An important area I hope to explore in the future is the place of the relational Spirit with regard to ecology.

Methodologically, my approach is focused by the anthropological assumptions of Etche/West African cosmo-religious world-views. Using the Etche tradition as a reference point allows me to utilize its core tenet of relationality as my interpretive and organizing framework for an alternative template in arguing for a better insight into pneumatology. Through this framework, there emerges to view a new understanding of the Triune God's transcendence as dynamically creative of harmony through differential relations. Let me also be clear that the Etche cosmo-religious world-view is predominantly an oral tradition. I will, therefore, be drawing on its rich repository of symbols, art, proverbs, rituals, folktalks, and so forth, as well as on my personal local experience as one who inhabits that world-view. Since our context and space fall within the modern/colonial world system, my method shall also include a critical socio-cultural and historical analysis of the African context. In the light of the outcome of this analysis, our interpretive tool will allow us to critically reread the Bible and Christian traditions so as to have new understandings of the Person and *proprium* of the Holy Spirit that are liberative. Moreover, I shall also draw on the insights of postcolonial and decolonial thought and from the social sciences and history as well. My approach is, therefore, archaeologico-critical, anthropological, hermeneutical, interdisciplinary, and descriptive. And finally, my adoption of the framework of relationality which abhors absolutism

allows me to seek the best in both the African and non-African traditions shun of romanticism or essentialism in order to challenge systemic and systematic structures of evil that have continued to be life-denying for Africans.

0.3 The Value of the Study

This dissertation will be relevant to theology in several ways. As an effort toward creating a pathway for negotiating differences and engendering harmonious living amidst differences, this work holds great potentials for: Trinitarian theology, communion ecclesiology, interreligious/ecumenical dialogue, ecology, Feminist theology, intercultural hermeneutics, soteriology and Liberation theology, theological anthropology, missiology, and Public theology (since our understanding of the Spirit would be crucial for the transformation of African imagination and the social transformation of Africa as well). These are some of the important areas that need continual expansion in relation to African Christian theology, and this dissertation provides building blocks for such a prospect.

0.4 The Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. The first chapter historicizes the loss of the relational quality of the Triune God—mediated by the Spirit—in Western Latin theological tradition by tracing its root back to the legacy of Greek metaphysics. I contend that caught up in the trap of ahistorical absolutes in matters of God-Spirit talk, Western theology assumed a totalitarian bent and thereby undermined relationality and the dignity of equality-in-difference. I also argue that the loss of relationality (hence, the forgetfulness of the Spirit) enthroned Eurocentric absolutism used to legitimate and justify colonialism and the slavery of Africans. This constitutes a crisis in Latin theology,

and hence, the need for an “other paradigm of thinking.”

Chapter two digs into the Etche cosmo-religious world-view in search of an “other paradigm” and an interpretive tool. The concept of relationality which is a core tenet of the Etche religious universe would be explored as helpful for overcoming the dualism between the sacred and the mundane, the supernatural and the natural, and hence, the involvement or engagement of the divine (mediated by the Universal Holy Spirit) in the world of human beings. In this way, absolutism which led to the dislocation and subalternization of Africa is dismantled and the dignity of difference and plurality is restored.

In chapter three, utilizing relationality as an interpretive device, certain biblical and Patristic tropes on the Holy Spirit are critically reread and reinterpreted to allow for new understandings of the relational Spirit as the Giver of life. I argue that the relational Spirit gives life and bestows differences as a gift. Yet, the relational Spirit as Lord resists and subverts whatever negative forces that try to diminish the Spirit-given life and/or to destroy differences. I draw on contemporary theological sources to illustrate this stance.

The fourth chapter envisions hospitality/friendship as practical ways to concretize relationality in relating to others who may be different from us (due to religion, gender, ethnicity, and so forth). My main interest here is in evincing the subversive, resistant, and interpellatory nature of hospitality in confronting the structures of power configurations that exclude, oppress, subjugate, and silence the other. I submit that solidarity of others require that genuine relationships of friendship be enacted on the basis of a balance of power shun of paternalism. As members of the body of Christ who have been befriended by the hospitable God, we are to embody God’s dance of love for the world. It remains an

excellent model for an African theology.

Chapter five is an effort toward constructing an African Christian pneumatology. Utilizing the valuable resources from the Etche and West African dimensions of spirit-experience, I rearticulate and rework an understanding of the Universal Holy Spirit whose manifold operations are manifested through the instrumentality of the “many spirits” of African ancestral religions. I draw on and at the same time expand the insights of African Independent Church’s (AICs). Finally, the implications of this new understanding along with suggestions for being church today in Africa as a whole and particularly in Nigeria, is treated.

Chapter 1

The Crisis of Pneumatology in Western Systematic Theology

1.0 Introduction

This first chapter unpacks the knapsack of the crisis that has for too long plagued pneumatology in Western (Latin) systematic theology.¹ The chapter makes the case that the tragic encounter between Africa and the West culminating in slavery, colonialism, neocolonialism, and the current experience of globalization is not entirely unconnected with the inadequate and lopsided attention to the person, autonomy, and *proprium* of the Spirit in Western theology. Some of the key factors that fomented the said crisis, including neo-Scholastic substance-theistic ontology and the subordination of the Spirit in Christology would be examined among others. The neo-Scholastic bent toward absolute abstraction—a heritage of Greek metaphysical tradition—paved the way for the logocentrism of the modernity/coloniality world system. Modernity which arose from the ashes of the breakdown of medieval synthesis played a key role in the furtherance of the eclipse of the Spirit will equally be investigated. It is my contention here that a recovery of the understanding of the Spirit as relational would be helpful in the negotiation of the boundaries of difference and in overcoming the use of difference for oppressive and

¹ It is worth noting that there was a rich tradition of spirituality especially in the medieval era which focused more on the action of the Spirit in the spiritual life. However, there was a lack of the same concentration in systematic theology to express the *proprium* of the Spirit. For a detailed consideration of the place of the Spirit in the spirituality of the Middle Ages, see Elizabeth A. Dreyer, *Holy Power, Holy Presence: Rediscovering Medieval Metaphors for the Holy Spirit* (New York and Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2007); Stanley M. Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Medieval Roman Catholic and Reformation Traditions* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997).

exclusionary purposes. It would also provide a template for negotiating “an other” discourse on the Trinitarian God that recognizes the Spirit as person and not just force or energy. This approach will, thus, allow for an opening of new and enriching possibilities and vistas in the “Self – Other” encounter, individually, institutionally, and communally. To be treated also are certain clarifications of some key terminologies that will feature frequently in this work.

1.2 The Inadequate Attention to Pneumatology

For too long a certain crisis has dogged the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the history of Western theology. This crisis borders predominantly on the inadequate and unbalanced attention paid to the third person of the Trinity in comparison to the Father and the Son. Even the Creeds of Nicaea 325 and Constantinople 381 in comparison with the Father and the Son, could not use *homoousios* for the Holy Spirit.² About the Father and the Son, volumes have been written, specifying their proper character, personhood, and function, but the same has yet to be elaborately accomplished with respect to the Holy Spirit. The neglect of the Spirit in whom God relates to the world through Christ led, among other things, to a very transcendentalized and abstract conception of God that clearly severed the supernatural from the natural. Such neglect of the Holy Spirit is not without consequences for both Western theology, the general history of the church, and Western relationship with non-Western “Others.”

² Gary D. Badcock, *Light of Truth and Fire of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 45-61; Walter Kasper comments that this “lack of use of *homoousios* in the article of faith on the Holy Spirit as it is used in the article on Jesus Christ is, indeed, striking.” Kasper, nonetheless, observes that “churchmen had learned a lesson from the confusion that followed on Nicaea; and so it is likely, therefore, that they deliberately avoided this disputed term, which was open to misunderstanding and was not attested in scripture.” Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 213.

The Spirit is variously depicted as the principle of relationality,³ the bond of love, and the source of unity within God's Triune identity. An understanding of God as essentially relational or otherwise shapes an understanding of who we are and what kind of vocation we have in the world we inhabit. As a loving communion and loving relationality, the Triune God, in opening out to the other calls into being creation and human beings who have the potential for realizing loving relationality. As the principle of relationality and mediation, the Spirit safeguards not only the equality-in-difference between the Father and the Son, but also that between humans in their communion with the Triune God. To talk of the Triune God as relational is simply not the product of human speculation or construction. It is rather an inference—to the question of “who” God is—drawn from God's self-revelation as is evident in the *oikonomia*, in the missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit as enshrined in the Scriptures. This rich biblical understanding and important ancient Christian insight into the identity of the Spirit and God as relational was lost sight of in the Western (particularly Latin) theological tradition in later centuries.

³ For a consideration of a number of theologians who call attention to the category of relationality and its importance to God's identity, see Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*; Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books and Reprint Enugu, Nigeria: SNAAP Press, 1996); Eberhard Jüngel, *God As the Mystery of the World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1983); Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996); Ted Peters, *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/ John Knox, 1993); Catherine M. LaCugna, “The Relational God: Aquinas and Beyond,” *Theological Studies* 46 (1985): 647-63; idem, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco, California: HarperCollins, 1992). Also some feminist theologians have stressed on the meaningfulness of loving relationality as a fundamental character of God and reality: see Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983); Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992). Also John D Zizioulas, *Being As Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985); William C. Placher, *Narratives of a Vulnerable God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox, 1994).

To gain some appreciation of the situation, it may be helpful to briefly highlight what constitutes a crisis. According to Wilfried Härle: a crisis can be seen as comprising, *inter alia*, the following characteristics: [1] it constitutes a threat to the being of an individual or a community which can concern its very existence, validity of its meaning system and its identity; [2] it is necessarily ambivalent, its outcome is still open; [3] it does not come unprepared, but is the culmination of often hidden factors and forces which have been there for a long time; [4] it divides the past and the future so that the appropriation of the past in the present determines the possibilities of the future; and last but not least, [5] it necessitates change.⁴ All of the above aspects of a crisis apply to the current state of pneumatology. The crisis may truly be profound; it is, nonetheless, in the nature of a crisis to be ambivalent and so open to new possibilities and change. Such characteristic ambivalence which holds out promise, in some respects, is a reason for hope and for the present effort at recovering relational pneumatology. But a reconstruction of pneumatology that will be relevant for our current context can only be achieved by a successful identification and clarification of the causes of the crisis *ab initio*. One key factor, among others, that led to the eclipse of the Spirit in Latin theology is the theological framework of neo-Scholasticism.

1.2.1 The Medieval Synthesis and Neo-Scholastic Substance-Theistic Theology

The emergence of Christianity from the Jewish subculture and its incarnation into the more dominant culture of the pure Greco-Roman world was not just a boon but also

⁴ Wilfried Härle, "Krise in theologischer Sicht," in *Wege Zum Menschen* 28(1977): 408-16 cited in Christoph Schwöbel, "Christology and Trinitarian Thought," in *Trinitarian Theology Today: Essays on Divine Being and Act*, ed. Christoph Schwöbel (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995), 114.

problematic for the Christian faith. In the long history of Greek philosophical thought, it is clear that the divine is characterized as an eternal, impersonal, impassible, immutable, perfect, stable, and transcendent principle. The divine, for instance, for Plato is the Idea, Form, or the Good—which, as a universal—manifests or mirrors itself only dimly in the many subordinate particular alterable entities in the cosmos but itself remains unalterable.⁵ Aristotle calls it the Unmoved Mover or Pure Act. In Aristotelian metaphysics—the finest articulation of Greek genius—the Pure Act is characterized as changeless, simple,⁶ having no personal relation with the world, and simply contemplates itself, hence, a self-thinking-thought or substance.⁷ The self which thinks itself lacks

⁵ See Plato, *Republic* 7. 509b.

⁶ For Aristotle, the pure act precisely as pure act is devoid of potentiality and, hence, outside the sphere of numerical plurality. It is pure simplicity devoid of individuation. According to Aristotle, “all things that are many in number have matter.” But the unmovable first mover is one both in definition and in number. In this way, Aristotle attempted to dissociate part of the religious beliefs of his time, precisely, that the divine encloses the whole of nature, from philosophical discourse. Aristotle in his treatise “On the Soul,” reports the religious and theological statement of Thales that “all things are full of gods,” a statement which Aristotle thought was inspired by the commonplace opinions then that “the soul is diffused throughout the whole universe.” See *De Anima*, I, 5, 411^a 8-9. For Aristotle, then, to assert the intermingling of the divine and nature is to introduce matter into the divine rather than seeing it as pure essence. In other words, the divine is diametrically unrelated to matter. See Aristotle, *Met*, XII, 8, 1074^a 34, 36, 1074^b 2.

⁷ Aristotle maintains that “the divine substance which thinks nothing but itself does so because, if it were to think of something other than itself, then that means that the divine substance itself does not constitute the act of thinking, and therefore, is a potency, and not the best substance; there would then evidently be something more precious than itself, namely, that which it thinks. It is, therefore, not possible for the Aristotelian divine substance to think of matter which would be like thinking the worst thing in the world. Therefore, it must be about itself that the divine thought thinks (since it is the most excellent of things), and its thinking is a thinking on thinking.” The divine self contemplation excludes everything that is not God. God in Aristotle exists apart and lives in isolation. See *Met*, XII, 9, 1074^b 15-23, 29-34. Again, because the pure act is the most excellent of things, it is the most desirable and because it is the most desirable, its relation to the cosmos in Aristotelian metaphysics is not in the mode of efficient causality. The cosmos relates to pure act only in the manner of finality. Indeed, God in Aristotelian philosophical theology does not know a world he did not create. This is contrary to the Christian claim that the triune God is the creator, the life-giver, the sustainer, and redeemer of the world, as well as the eschatological end and consummation of the world; God is “the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End” (Rev 22:13), for it is “in him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

relationality or openness to the other outside itself. At best, the self-thinking-thought is deistic whose function is limited precisely to being the first/unmoved mover which ignites a series of other movers. Thus, Divinity's relation to the world and humans was conceived in terms of mechanistic causality. From the outset, this conceptuality is irreconcilable with the Christian claim that God—whose self-communication or self-gift understood as grace which is a gracious and gratuitous non-object—is essentially relational and personal. As represented by both Plato and Aristotle, it is obvious that the Hellenistic depiction of the divine essentially entails unchangeability and impassibility.⁸

⁸ It is important at this point to make some clarifications with regard to those inherited Hellenistic attributes used to qualify the divine, particularly, *transcendence, immutability/perfection, impassibility, and omnipotence*. I aim here to a re-conceptualization of these attributes in the light of recent scholarship. To begin with, William Placher, in his illuminating book, *The Domestication of Transcendence*, makes the case that it was modern (more precisely, seventeenth century) philosophers/theologians rather than medieval/neo-scholastic or classical theologians who domesticated transcendence. They Domesticated transcendence in the following ways: first, by their vigorous confidence and optimism about the capacity of human reason to comprehend God perfectly, and secondly, by their conceptualization of God as an utter otherness, radically different and unrelated to the created order; hence, their contrastive understanding of transcendence—saying that God is distant, remote, unaffected—and immanence, meaning that God is close and involved. See William C. Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking about God Went Wrong* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 1- 17, especially chap. 7. While I concur with Placher that seventeenth century theology which shared the same epistemic background with modern philosophy was theistic, I do, however, have reservations on his position with regard to classical theism. It is fair to admit that classical theologians were aware that it was about the living God of the Bible that they attempted to make intelligible utilizing the Greek categories of Perfect Being, immutability, and necessity, and others. But it is also true that their “passion for intelligibility meant, historically, an overemphasis upon the categories of nature and substance, a consciousness of cosmos to the neglect of history, a preference for the universal and the necessary over the individual and undetermined.” See William J. Hill, *The Three-Personed God: The Trinity as a Mystery of Salvation* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 210. Indeed, there is no gainsaying the fact that medieval and classical theology so radicalized divine omnipotence and freedom as to turn God into a tyrant. This view was no more evident than in medieval Nominalism which “carried the idea of God's omnipotence and freedom to an extreme, turning God into an absolutist deity who acts in an arbitrary manner.” See Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 17. Not surprisingly, it is this classical idea of God who is oppressive to human freedom that is in part, the presupposition for the revolt in modern thought to liberate the autonomy of subjectivity from the tyranny of theonomy. Of course, the conceptualization of omnipotence of deity was mirrored in the power of the one emperor, one church, one theology, one tradition, one Pope. Challenge to these hierarchies by way of alternative conceptualities was under penalty of death by burning on the stakes. To this extent, I maintain that classical theism is a fact.

In current scholarship, there is a growing change of understanding with regard to the categories under consideration. Marcel Sarot in his breathtaking *opus* has not only carried out a fascinating research on God's passibility but has also provided an intimidating bibliography on the subject and other concomitant issues. See Marcel Sarot, *God, Passibility and Corporeality* (Kampen, The Netherlands: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1992). To begin with, it is important to make a distinction between impassibility and immutability. The term impassibility from the Latin "*impassibilitas*" or the Greek "*apatheia*," originally means "incapable of being acted upon by an outside force." On a little expansion, the meaning includes incapable of being acted upon either by an outside or inside force (Sarot, 26). This outside or inside force may include passions, feelings, suffering, etc. It is in this sense that impassibility is often seen as synonymous with immutability. Sarot, utilizing Vincent Brümmer's conceptualities, nicely distinguishes between: being affected in a personal way and being causally influenced. Causal influence engenders a necessary reaction in that which is acted upon; e.g., causally influencing a bell to ring, or hypnotizing someone to carry out the hypnotist's suggestion. But to affect someone in a personal way, even though such an affecting may be persuasive, the affected, to some extent, still has a choice as to the manner s/he allows herself/himself to be affected. Many passibilist theologians maintain that the second distinction, more than of humans, is true of God who is supremely master of himself. For passibilists, therefore, God can be influenced in a personal way only and never in a causal way since God can never be under causal constraint (27-9). For the advocates of this position to which I incline, God can be influenced by what happens in the world but only in a personal way, in that God remains master of his own reactions, as well as remains immutable in his nature, will, and knowledge. The passibilist position flies in the face of the classical ideals of *apatheia* and *ataraxeia*—which see certain experiences: suffering, sympathy, etc., as evil and as such, incompatible with the divine perfection (32). But it must be admitted that the passibilist ascription of such experiences to God is somehow by way of analogy or metaphor. An impassible God is not able to adequately express divine concern for his suffering creature. An impassible God is not capable of vulnerable love, because love involves vulnerability. Since a genuinely personal love is essentially sacrificial and costly, it is then difficult if not impossible to love in an invulnerable manner (156-9). Vulnerability entails "susceptibility to unpleasant and noxious experiences. A vulnerable person is not able or not willing to protect herself against these experiences, and is therefore easily wounded by them" (176). The "*pathos*" of the triune God entails God's involvement in history and engagement in the plight of humanity. Such terms as "*pathos*" and "*passio*" are often combined with other terms to denote passibility in God: such terms include *sym-patheia/sun-paschein* – suffering with, *em-patheia* – sharing in another's feelings or emotions, and *compassio/compati* – suffering with. William C. Placher in his *Narratives of a Vulnerable God: Christ, Theology, and Scripture* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), captures the purpose served by divine impassibility in its Hellenistic context; it was the same meaning that was transposed into classical Christian theology. According to Placher, "Divine impassibility served two functions. It ruled out vulgar passions: no more rapes, no more private vengeance. At the same time, it preserved divine power. Part of what power...[means] is that one can affect others for good or ill but yet remain unthreatened by them, invulnerable. It is the most powerful ruler who is safe and secure from external threat...without any risks from outside. For God, then, impassibility guarantees omnipotence" (5). What is significant here is Placher's notice of how impassibility was an expression of omnipotence. Such a powerful God was an utterly transcendent God, uninvolved in human predicament, lest he become passible, and whose power is for domination, and if need be, through violence.

But the Christian God of revelation, the Triune God, and the God who is encountered in the narratives of the Bible, is a God who is vulnerable in love (Ibid., 6-7), and a God whose power is manifest in weakness and self-giving, and not a power to dominate others. Thus, God is both transcendent and immanent and at the same time is beyond transcendence and immanence. God as the truly infinite is not

It was this Greek metaphysical legacy that the Christianity of the first six to thirteen centuries inherited to articulate the faith.

This inherited Hellenistic matrix was problematic for the patristic and medieval periods and remains so for modern theology. It is so when considered in light of the Christian claim that the God who revealed himself through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit is, in fact, a personal God who is present to humans in the world and actively involved in their history. It became a matter of struggle for the patristic period to reconcile the discrepant Greek metaphysical presupposition and the Christian claim. This struggle in the patristic tradition came to a climax: “first in the creed of 325 confessing that the Son was ὁμοούσιος with the Father, secondly in the creed of 381 which then drew the conclusion from that first symbol and the subsequent debates about the Holy Spirit that God was a Trinity of Father, Son, and Spirit, and finally at Chalcedon in 451 where the doctrine of the two natures of Christ was affirmed.”⁹ It is historically obvious that the differing interpretations of the Hellenistic conceptualities employed by the councils and enshrined in the creeds have been church-dividing. In all these councils and creeds the Greek philosophical conceptuality, undoubtedly, provided a framework for articulating the Christian claim. Nevertheless, both traditions remained unreconciled.

simply the opposite of the finite but also transcends such opposition. God cannot just be fully conceptualized in the binarisms that have been constructed to comprehend him. God, in his self-determination, out of love freely chooses his manner of relationality with humans. Granted, God is immutable by nature; however, in his freedom of self-determination, God personally and freely decides in love to be passible. In the God of revelation, what Christians encounter is not so much about ‘*what*’ as about ‘*who*’ God is. And God is Love; a communion of persons. See Hill, *The Three-Personed God*, 211. To claim that God is not passible is to deny freedom to God and to ascribe necessity to him as if God cannot freely choose to be vulnerable in love.

⁹ Bradford E. Hinze and D. Lyle Dabney, eds. *Advents of the Spirit: An Introduction to the Current Study of Pneumatology* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 2001), 13.

It was not until the medieval epoch that a synthesis would be worked out. Some philosophers *cum* theologians of the medieval era readily employed the Platonic/Aristotelian metaphysical categories for the construction of their theologies. This was achieved in Western theology starting earlier with Augustine of Hippo (using Platonism prior to the medieval era); others who furthered the synthesis include, Boethius, Anselm of Canterbury, Thomas Aquinas (using Aristotelianism proper), Duns Scotus, William of Occam, and others.¹⁰ But even with the forging of such synthesis, the Christian God was more or less posited as a philosophical postulate and not really as the personal, relational God of the Bible.

With this medieval synthesis between the Christian tradition and the Greek cultural and philosophical architectonic, the path was already charted for what would eventually emerge as classical neo-Scholastic theism. With its substance ontology and theism, neo-Scholasticism presented God as static rather than dynamic, as transcendent and almost uninvolved in and untouched by the world. In attempting to prove God's existence, for instance, God became the Unmoved Mover, the Perfect Being, and Pure Simplicity with no room for complexity "whereas in the gospel the divine nature is essentially a dynamic communion of love and a transcendence capable of immanence by virtue of it."¹¹ Its preoccupation became the unity of "what" God is in his essence rather than "who" God is as revealed in the missions of the Son and the Spirit. Conceived as the Perfect Being, the Being of beings, the God of revelation was reduced to the god of

¹⁰ See Ibid.

¹¹ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1991), 21-32, 61-79. See also François-Xavier Durrwell, *Holy Spirit of God: An Essay in Biblical Theology*, trans. Sister Benedict Davies, O.S.U. (Cincinnati, Ohio: Servant Books, 2006), 21.

philosophy, hence, the emergence of ontotheology.¹² Solicitous to preserve divine transcendence, neo-Scholastic ontology consequently espoused theistic rigidified dualisms like—supernatural-natural, sacred-profane, spirit-matter, soul-body, and so forth—as separate substances with no commonality whatsoever between them. But God’s relation with humans through Christ in the Spirit remains an en-worlded and embodied experience as Philip Clayton affirms.¹³ God is permanently pervading the universe. God in his freedom has radically permeated humanity in the mystery of the incarnation, the self-gift of God to the world. Thus, we can rightly talk of the humanity of God; God who exists, walks with, and is involved in the vagaries and sufferings of his people. God’s humanity is, indeed, “a radical affirmation of divine Self-definition as *Deus pro nobis*.”¹⁴ In the neo-Scholastic substance framework, therefore, the Spirit stopped

¹² Jean-Luc Marion regards such ontotheological assumptions about the God of revelation as idolatrous and rather proffers the metaphor of icon for speaking about the disclosure of the divine. To speak of God in terms of Being as Being is delimiting and essentializing because God is beyond being or otherwise than being. See Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995) and Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 1998).

¹³ Philip Clayton, “In Whom We Have our Being: Philosophical Resources for the Doctrine of the Spirit,” in *Advents of the Spirit*, 200.

¹⁴ Michael J. Scanlon, “Trinity and Transcendence” in *Transcendence and Beyond: A Postmodern Inquiry*, ed. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007), 75. Also Karl Barth in his later writings realizes and emphasizes the importance of the “humanity of God” for us which was more or less discounted in his earlier works where he feared the magnification of human beings at the expense of God or the conflation of God with humanity, and thus, God confronts humanity as the *totaliter aliter* ‘totally other.’ Hence, his earlier theology was essentially dialectical. But in his mature theology, Barth starts with confession of faith in Jesus Christ the God-man as the basis of talk about God. In this way, Barth came to understand the failure of his dialectical theology to comprehend God in the sense that who God is does not consist in his being totally other but rather in his being for humanity; that “the *divinity* of the *living* God has its meaning and power only in the context of his history and of his dialogue with *humanity*, and therefore in his *togetherness* with humanity.” Thus, “god’s *divinity* rightly understood includes his *humanity*.” See Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God*, trans. John Newton Thomas and Thomas Wieser (London: Collins, 1961); Badcock, *Light of Truth and Fire of Love*, 172-175; also Eberhard Jüngel speaks of God as essentially relational and radically involved in the

speaking to human embodied experiences.

Since for Plato, matter/body was considered the prison of the spirit from which the spirit ceaselessly seeks release; and for Aristotle, matter was considered the principle of individuation and hence, of numerical plurality, and therefore, inferior, then God must have nothing to do with bodiliness since God must be viewed as pure simplicity. It is against such a backdrop that the divine, especially in the late medieval period became over-spiritualized, over-intellectualized, and indeed, platonized. Since how we conceive God also affects how we view ourselves, it is not surprising that the epoch in question depicted the person as “*individua substantia naturae rationalis*,” (an individual substance of a rational nature). This is the Boethian definition of person. In this understanding, person was divorced from relationality and salvation was limited to saving rational souls rather than the human person. The *imago Dei* was construed as present only in the human soul since God could not be identified with matter or body. That this is unsurprising is also partly because of the Western religious heritage which witnesses a bifurcation of thought/intellect and feeling/affectivity, theology (neo-Scholastic) and piety, spiritual experience and reflective tradition. English theologian, Sarah Coakley poignantly captures the situation in the later medieval period, precisely, in the fourteenth century:

there was a discernible, and tragic, disjunction occurring between intellectual, scholastic approaches to God on the one hand, and pietistic feeling-and-body-oriented approaches on the other. This was carried over in a different way into theories of prayer, so that, for instance, ‘contemplation’ could be construed either as the pure ‘intellect’ communing with God or, quite differently, as a deliberate shutting down of the mind in favour of the will or ‘affe-

world. See Eberhard Jüngel, *The Doctrine of the Trinity: God’s Being is in Becoming* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1976).

ctivity.’ In a variety of ways piety and theology were being rent apart in the West.¹⁵

The observations of Coakley only confirm the ossified theistic dualisms of neo-Scholastic theology especially between body and spirit. The human body and its passions were seen as inimical to the spirit, as evil, and inclined to iniquity, and hence, not a dimension of God’s involvement because inferior to the spirit.¹⁶ But Christian experience and practice indicate the contrary. In the communion of the church the Spirit has already effectuated a unity of the divine and the human, the inner and the outer, soul and body. This is most exemplified in the Eucharist, the other sacraments and practices of the church. The task of theology is to discern, follow, reflect upon, and clarify this antecedent action of the Spirit with the awareness that neither the church nor theology constructs or constitutes this communion or unity. On the contrary, just about the same

¹⁵ Sarah Coakley, “Charismatic Experience: Praying in the Spirit,” in *The Holy Spirit: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Eugene F. Rogers, Jr. (Malden, MA and West Sussex, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 72-3.

¹⁶ This view is not unconnected with the ancient approach that privileges spirit over body/matter. From Greco-Roman antiquity through the middle ages, emphasis was always placed on the control and moderation of the body and its passions and motions as a mark of virtue, heroism, and elitism. Such approach was modeled on the immobility and impassibility of the divine, which ideal became the standard for elites, nobles, philosophers, rhetoricians, orators, spiritual masters, etc. Such godlike immobility was viewed as superior and so preferred to bodily mobility which was reckoned inferior; hence, the spirit preferred to the body. The spirit became characterized by immobility as opposed to the body whose basic lineament became motions. This forms part of the background to Stoic asceticism which requires immobile indifference to pain and suffering as a mark of heroic virtue. To be godlike, then is for the spirit/mind to exercise dominion over the body. The body as noted above is, according to Plato, a prison for the soul; thus, a burden that needs to be done away with. As a Platonist, Augustine of Hippo in his interpretation of the Fall (his *lapsus*), construes the body as fallen which can only be elevated through grace. This ideal of moderating and mortifying the body is well exemplified in monastic ascetic traditions. But it is the case that the human person is a more holistic and complex entity—consisting of a complexity of spirit, mind, soul, body, relations, emotions, etc. The Western dualistic conception of the human person in the world has its rootage in the metaphysical and theological conceptions of the transcendent and impassible God. For more on this see Peter Brown, *The Body and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Augustine, “Against Two Letters of Pelagius,” 4.7, in P. Scaff and H. Wace, eds. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Church*, 2nd Series, vol. V (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1986).

time in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, Gregory Palamas was championing the defense “of ‘hesychast’ practices...defending the use of the body in prayer and effecting in the East an extraordinary and unexpected *synthesis* (emphasis original) of ‘affective’ and ‘intellectual’ traditions of prayer in that context, [while] the West was busy driving a wedge between them.”¹⁷ Palamas understands the need to view the human person more holistically. Since for the West, the spiritual or intellectual dimension trumped the corporeal, God was associated with the soul or spiritual aspect instead of the whole person. Again, in the Orthodox tradition, the question of iconography remains prevalent. This tradition recognizes the fact that divine activities and realities are always mediated. Thus icons become the possible material means and symbols through which the divine self is personally communicated in the Spirit and as such the pledge of our sanctification.¹⁸ All in all, the nature of the revelation of the Triune God does not call for such sclerotic dualisms that have plagued Western theistic theology.

1.2.2 The Subordination of the Spirit

More than anything else, theism as described above was the matrix that undergirded Christian theological discourse on the Triune God spanning from the medieval era, the Reformation through the modern period. In the wake of the Reformation and in the Post-Tridentine theology, the Spirit was not only assimilated into *Logos* (Christology), subordinated to the mission of the Son, but also confined to the margins of ecclesiastical juridicism. Granted, the Spirit is self-effacing, in the sense that

¹⁷ Cited in Coakley, “Charismatic Experience,” in *The Holy Spirit: Classic and Contemporary*, 73.

¹⁸ See Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002), 10, 189.

rather than drawing attention to the self, the Spirit always reveals Christ and his work culminating in the glory of the Father. To be sure, this type of conception of the Spirit has led many a theologian both past and present to neglect the characteristic *proprium* and person of the Spirit. It is this tendency that has more often than not, led to what Yves Congar describes as the christologization¹⁹ of the Spirit with a consequent disavowal of the Spirit's autonomy. Besides, by revealing Christ, and through Christ revealing the Father, the Spirit reveals the Spirit as the means or medium of revelation. It is in the light and transparency of the Spirit that we see the Son and the Father. There has also been a propensity to conflate the Spirit with the glorified Christ. Admittedly, intimations of this tendency are present in the Scripture, for example, the Pauline references to Christ as the last Adam who has become a life-giving spirit (cf. 1 Cor 15:45); "the Lord is spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor 3: 17), and "the Lord who is spirit" (1 Cor 3: 18). The seeming identification of the glorified Christ and the Spirit is, as Congar puts it, "functional, that is to say, it is an operative unity."²⁰ It is not ontological, since both Christ and Spirit have their distinct identities (*hypostaseis*) though inseparably and mutually related. No doubt, the Spirit is the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of the Son (Gal 4:6), and the Spirit of Christ (Rom 8:9;

¹⁹ Congar notes how Otto A. Dilschneider constructed a dogmatic theology that amounts to a complete christologization of the creed, what he calls a "morphological Christology." It views the revelation of salvation history from a purely christological viewpoint. Thus, in the form of God, he would be the creative Christ. Christ in his cosmic role would refer to the first article of the creed, in his bodily and kenotic form to the second article, and in the form of the Spirit, because 'the Spirit is the form of the presence of the pneumatic Christ,' he would refer to the third article of the creed. The Church and the sacraments would be the form of Christ taken by grace. See Yves M. J. Congar, *The Word and the Spirit*, trans., David Smith (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers and London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1986), 1-2.

²⁰ Ibid., 25.

Phil 1:19). At the same time, Jesus is also of the Spirit, not only in his conception, but also in his messianic activity and in his being raised to the quality of ‘Lord.’²¹ Indeed, Christ and the Spirit, as Scriptures attest to, are always inseparably linked together but should not be confused. In the words of Walter Kasper, “the famous formula: ‘The Lord is the Spirit’ (2 Cor 3:17) means that the Spirit is the effective mode of presence and the present effectiveness of the exalted Lord in the Church and in the World.”²² The Spirit continues to make the exalted Christ present without being identical with him.

Central to the pneumatological crisis in Western theology is the fact that the Spirit was not studied in the Spirit’s own personhood. Indeed, during this long history of subordination, the Spirit had come to be known as the “silent” or “shy” member of the Trinity.²³ As Kilian McDonnell puts it, “pneumatology...was... constructed in...[a] way...that not even the available biblical witness was utilized and [as such] no real theological reflection took place. Divine life and revelation were all bound to the Logos.”²⁴ Thus, as much as possible, “one should not tie pneumatology to Christology in such a manner as to deprive the Spirit of a proper, specific personhood and function.”²⁵ The eclipse of the distinct identity and autonomy of the relational Spirit meant fundamentally the obliteration of difference, the consequences of which are historically

²¹ Ibid., 62.

²² Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 206.

²³ Dale Bruner, *The Holy Spirit – Shy Member of the Trinity*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1984). See also Amos Yong, *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2008), 57.

²⁴ Kilian McDonnell, “A Trinitarian Theology of the Holy Spirit?” *Theological Studies* 46 (1985): 195.

²⁵ Ibid., 194.

obvious.

With regard to ecclesiastical juridicism the Spirit merely functioned as a guarantee of magisterial teachings while enabling the religious assent of Christians to such teachings. Indeed, at some point, it appeared the Spirit and the function of the Spirit were supplanted and overshadowed by the Pope, the Eucharist, and the Virgin Mary.²⁶ In this perspective, the Spirit was perceived to be under the authority of the church; the Pope rather than the Holy Spirit became the source of church unity, and the Eucharist was simply conformed by the power of the priest and the pronouncement of the words of institution devoid of *epiklesis*. Ecclesiastical juridicism, as Donald L. Gelpi has succinctly expressed, “attempts to direct the action of the Spirit into channels that are socially proper and canonically acceptable to ecclesiastical bureaucrats [and rigidified structures]; but it ends by stifling Spirit consciousness in predictable religious routines. [It domesticates]...the divine and...[keeps] it within the realm of the familiar, the predictable, and the controllable.”²⁷ Consequently, the neglect of the Spirit who is the source of unity and communion amounted to the obliteration of difference by reducing otherness to the regime of sameness. And since at the time, there was intimate identification of church and state, equality-in-difference degenerated into a calcified uniformity. The idea of diversity and plurality in the one church was lost and, as a result,

²⁶ See Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 1, trans. David Smith (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1983), 152-56, 160-64.

²⁷ Donald L. Gelpi, *The Divine Mother: A Trinitarian Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Lanham, New York, and London: University Press of America, 1984), 6.

the theology of the local church was lost until rediscovered by Vatican II.²⁸ A particular Western inculturated Christianity and local theology and epistemology, became absolutized and exported to all parts of the planet as the only form normal for all. Abstract speculations grounded in Greek foundationalism that ended only in concepts with no bearing to quotidian lived reality became the stock-in-trade. The Christian confession became distanced from the tensions that form the fabric of existential situations and contextual experiences. Since Europe was predominantly Christian at the time, European humanity, Christianity, history, and indeed, Eurocentricism came to be viewed as normative—not only as the quintessential humanity *as such*— but also as the apex of universality and historicity.

Western epistemological framework (which undergirds Western theology) lays claim to totality as universality. Such a claim is traceable to Plato's epistemological construal as *anamnesis*.²⁹ For Plato, every particular knowledge comes merely as a recollection of its universal which is eternal, immutable, absolute, and transcendent, and of which only a certain category of people capable of the highest exercise of reason, can grasp. This view holds that the experience of a particular perception only recalls to mind its universal since all knowledge is already immanent in oneself; and therefore, one always already knows in advance all that one intends to know. Knowledge as *episteme* is absolute as opposed to *doxa* which is the realm of opinions. In this sense, there is no

²⁸ See my article, Okechukwu C. Njoku, "Vatican II and the Rediscovery of the Local Church: Significance for the African Church," *International Journal of African Catholicism* 3, no. 1 (Winter 2012):81-97.

²⁹ Cited in Colin Davis, *Levinas: An Introduction* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 40.

room for newness or spontaneity. Newness is suppressed to fit into the regime of the already known categories so that all will be just the same. Even when alterity, otherness, or difference is recognized, it is always only in order to possess, suppress, or incorporate it within the empire of sameness.³⁰ There is no room for genuine encounter with the other since the other is always condemned to objectification in order to be appropriated. This is tantamount to totalization because the subject/self or sameness objectifies and assimilates every other thing but is itself not open to receiving or learning anything from outside that it does not or cannot know or have. This dualistic framework between the ‘same and the other’ is inimical to the operations of the Spirit who blows spontaneously wherever, whenever, and however the Spirit wills; it is destructive of equality-in-difference, communion, creativity, and hence, of relationality. Such dualism domesticates the Spirit in a manner quite contrary to the Pauline injunction: “Do not stifle the Spirit” (1 Thess 5:16).

As stated earlier, the abstract speculations of the Schoolmen using Hellenistic conceptual framework imprisoned God in concepts with no real relation to reality. Indeed, at the time in question, abstract concepts were taken for reality. This easily brings to mind the issue of the well known controversy in the later medieval era between Nominalism³¹ and Realism. According to Kasper, “Nominalism carried the idea of God’s

³⁰ For this idea, I am beholden to the insights of Emmanuel Levinas in his effort to interpret Western philosophical tradition. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Interiority*, Nineteenth Printing, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 33-4.

³¹ Nominalism during the later middle ages marked one of the turning points in the struggle to liberate human thought from the totalizing dominion of abstractions; it was an attempt to negate the proclivity to grant personification to verbal abstractions which became the essence of Scholastic and neo-Scholastic substance theology/philosophy. Realism maintains that abstract qualities, quiddities, essences, names of genera and species were taken for *bona fide* objective realities. According to the Nominalists, however,

omnipotence and freedom to an extreme, turning him into an absolutist deity who acts in an arbitrary manner.”³² It is this idea of God that is rebelled against in subsequent modern thought. The architectonic of modernity was, therefore, poised to dethrone this arbitrary God in order to liberate the subject’s freedom, autonomy, and thus legitimate self-legislation and self-assertion. Modern thought got rid of nominalists’ preoccupation with conceptualism and replaced it with a concentration on the human subject and subjectivity. It is a revolt against “an overwhelming transcendence that enslaves human beings, as well as against ecclesiastical structures that had become rigid, reactionary, and repressive.”³³ Theism as articulated by neo-Scholasticism was pushed up to the hilt by the Enlightenment and modern philosophers. The said philosophers no longer saw any relevance in the explanation of reality through the mode of such abstractions which by default severed the relation between the natural and the supernatural. It may not be far from the truth to say that the dualism and theism of the neo-Scholastic epoch became the seedbed of the agnosticism, atheism, and the imperial ideology that characterized modernity. Indeed, scholars like J. B. Metz, M. Weber, K. Löwith, and a host of others

such abstraction was mere *flatus vocis*. Nevertheless, nominalism was so obsessed with rational certitude, self-evident truths, and necessary propositions/conclusions that it undermined the role of the concrete, existing human subject in the quest for knowledge and understanding. In other words, irrespective of who the subject is, regardless of the subject’s interest or attention or historical contexts, truth, as held by nominalism, is there for everyone to comprehend as necessarily and universally self-evident, immediately distinct and clear, and logically leading to necessary conclusions. Indeed, Nominalists negligence of the historicity of all truth culminated in conceptualism and absolutism. See Joseph Putti, *Theology as Hermeneutics: Paul Ricoeur’s Theory of Text Interpretation and Method in Theology* (Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 1991), 90.

³² Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 17.

³³ *Ibid.*, 8.

suggest that modern secularism is the consequence of Christianity;³⁴ that the transcendent conception of God/Spirit as separated from the world paved the way for an immanentistic worldly conception of the world. The issues that have been x-rayed so far are not to be viewed as a polemic against medieval and neo-scholastic substance theology. The point is rather to indicate its inadequacies in order to characterize a theology that is more relevant and more adequate to our contemporary situation. Above all, it is to point out how such theology also prepared the way for what would eventually emerge as domination of the “other” by the “same” under the disguise of civilization with the collusion of Christianity in the making of the modern/colonial world system.

1.3 Dialectical Philosophy, Europeandom, and the Modern/Colonial World System

The dialectical philosophies of history which dominated the discourse of difference from the time of European expansionism through the second half of the twentieth century did not emerge from a vacuum. Rather the way was already prepared for them by the medieval vision of reality and the sterile Scholastic/neo-Scholastic abstractions and conceptualism.³⁵ These dialectical philosophies which shaped the ontology and epistemology of the said centuries got stuck in the dualisms they created. To a large measure, this was because they lacked the capacity to sustain the dialectic without letting it collapse into absolutism, normativity, or homogenization. Some

³⁴ See Johann B. Metz, *Theology of the World*, ed. W. Glen-Doepel (New York: Burns & Oats, 1969); Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 2004); K. Löwith, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago: 1949). See also Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1967).

³⁵ See Gelpi, *The Divine Mother*, 211.

distinguished moments of this dialectical landscape include: the theistic contentions of Descartes, Voltaire, Rousseau, Hume, Kant, and Hegel; the positivism and socio-cultural evolutionism of Auguste Comte, M. Schlick, Herbert Spencer; and the proponents of African primitivism—primitive native and primitive monotheism—such as Placide Tempels. In what follows, we shall establish how such philosophies furnished a powerful rhetorical device that served the justification for colonialism and slavery in which the Western church to a large extent colluded with the state. We shall focus here on R. Descartes, D. Hume, I. Kant, G. W. F. Hegel, A. Comte, H. Spencer, and P. Tempels as representative of this development.

1.3.1 René Descartes

With the groundwork of the severance of the supernatural from the natural already hatched out in neo-Scholastic theology, if anything, by default, it remains only for modern philosophers to stretch it to its logical conclusion. Descartes (1596-1650) subjects the medieval foundation (authority) of knowledge to a methodic doubt in order to establish another basis that is clear and distinct. He registers his dissatisfaction with the medieval sterile abstractions and numinous conception of reality. He regards such basis for knowledge (which he captures in the metaphor of the evil genius – *genius malignus*) as deceptive and incapable of guaranteeing certainty. While doubting the apparent deceptions of the body (senses)—which for him means everything that has the quality of magnitude or extension—Descartes comes to the conclusion that the only thing that affords him clarity and certainty is consciousness. From this, Descartes devises his famous axiom “*Cogito ergo sum*” (I think therefore I am). In this way, Descartes radicalizes the medieval substance ontology not only by an exhaustive dualism between

res extensa and *res cogitans* but also between religion and science. With the Cartesian mathematical style axiom, the immanence of consciousness with its innatism or nativism³⁶ becomes the basis for knowing and explicating the corporeal world rather than the long held prejudices of sensory experience and doctrinal abstractions of the previous epochs. By asserting the self as primarily “a thinking being,”³⁷ Descartes privileges the subject and subjectivity over every other consideration and foundation.³⁸ Consequently, religion, ethics, the question of God and the Spirit come to be subject to the arbitration of the mind while being divorced from any causal relation to the material world. Put differently, the question of God and Spirit arises only within the compass of human subjectivity and interiority devoid of any reference to real objectivity.

As a matter of fact, having arrived at the certainty of the *cogito*, Descartes

³⁶ By innatism or nativism, Descartes holds that the human mind is not an absolute void—a perfect *tabula rasa*—at birth. The innate ideas are the basis of true knowledge. Not satisfied with his scholastic education, Descartes decided to subject everything he had known previously to doubt in order to arrive at clear and certain knowledge. To do this, he says that we need to rid ourselves of all our blindly accustomed and accepted traditions and ideas, to reject all existing authorities, to destroy and jettison all our beliefs and renounce all our opinions, in order to submit them all to the judgment of reason, and the control of truth. Only in this way can we hope to regain the native purity of our reason and to reach the certainty of truth. See René Descartes, *Philosophical Writings: A Selection*, trans. and eds. Elizabeth Anscombe and Peter Thomas Geach (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1954), xx.

³⁷ René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, II, 28 (22), ed. L. J. Lafleur (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1979), 27.

³⁸ This turn to the Subject and subjectivity is a very significant insight of modern thought. It is a turn that initially set out to take the human Subject seriously. It is a turn away from the idealized, infallible, self-evident truths, and necessary conclusions that characterized the preceding centuries dominated by naïve-realism and Nominalism. But this turn would become misguided when it is conceived to be a turn from the truly objective to the merely subjective and thus lapsing into solipsism. The significance of this insight lies in the fact that it is supposed to be a turn to the actual reality of human subjects in their concrete historical situations, a turn to a community of women and men in the attentiveness of their common contextual experiences, common human reflection, deliberation, scrutiny, and understanding of those experiences especially in light of the divine; for therein lie objective reality. Infallible and self-evident, universal premises are merely formalistic subjective constructions.

examined a cluster of other ideas present in his mind with the hope of ascertaining other truths that possessed the same sort of clarity and distinctness as the *cogito*. One of such ideas in his mind was the idea of a supreme God who is eternal, perfect, immutable, infinite, omnipotent, omniscient, and creator of all things that exist apart from him.³⁹ Descartes' idea of a perfect God is for the purpose of arguing that such a God is not deceptive since he must be immutable unlike other ideas that are prone to change and illusion. From this, Descartes infers that such a God must exist. Anchored on such sure foundation then, Descartes convinces himself that if he uses the faculties that this non-deceptive God has given him accordingly, then, he (Descartes) will not be deceived. It is only from such an intramental certainty that Descartes is able to recover most of the extramental world. It is, therefore, from the perfect, immutable, and non-deceptive nature of God as conceived by Descartes that he is able to argue for the certainty of the world.

God as understood by Descartes surely becomes an idol of metaphysics just for the functional purpose of serving as the sure foundation of his whole system of scientific and certain knowledge.⁴⁰ God is no longer seen as the Triune God who reveals God's self at God's own instance but only as God whose nature is clearly captured as perfect and in the concepts of subjectivity. Although, Descartes claims to have an idea of a perfect, infinite, and creator God, he ends up positing God as merely a guarantee for the certainty of the sensible world. The world comes to be explained mechanistically on the basis of its own immanentistic principles as perceived by subjectivity. The supernatural, including God and the spiritual, is completely other and has no commonality with such immanent

³⁹ Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence*, 81.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 82.

principles of the natural realm. Precisely because in Descartes the *ens cogitans* enjoys priority as opposed to the pre-Cartesian period when God was understood as *Ens Subsistens* (Self-sufficient Being) and the necessary ground of every *ens non subsistens*, God has been displaced and relegated to the ambience of pure thought. In both Descartes and post-Cartesian philosophy, both God as the Creator and the created world would remain to be understood only within and through the ambit of the *cogito* and purely as the content of human consciousness. Reduced to an element of the *cogito* (consciousness), God could no longer be considered the ultimate cause and explanation of the human *sum* and all of existence. Henceforth, modern philosophy became preoccupied with “beings *qua* content of consciousness and not *qua* existing independently of it.”⁴¹ In this way, the Triune God of revelation and faith, the hidden God, and the God who contains and pervades the whole world, is eclipsed. Invariably, the Cartesian claim to clear and distinct knowledge including the purported grasp of God’s perfect nature with precision, only amounts to the subject’s self positing, and ultimately, as Friedrich Nietzsche opines, will to power.

The Cartesian *cogito* thus lies at the explicit source of the autonomous individualism distinctive of the modern Western construal of person. No doubt, this Western view of person is legitimate as it is based on particular contextual cultural experiences and philosophical assumptions. But then, it is only one perspective among others and its legitimacy does not grant it a claim to be the sole conception of person as eventually became the case. With the Cartesian radical catapulting of God and the

⁴¹ John Paul II, *Memory and Identity: Conversations at the Dawn of a Millennium* (Milan: Rizzoli International Publications, 2006), 28.

spiritual merely to the realm of the symbolic and the metaphoric with no real relation to the material world, Cartesianism is essentially suffused with Godlessness.⁴² In this radical conceptual framework, “the world becomes godless; God becomes worldless,”⁴³ as Kasper vividly puts it. Henceforward, Religion and the God/Spirit-question would be reduced to a private matter of subjectivity, and would thus become superfluous in the coherent explication of the world, life, and reality.⁴⁴ Henceforth, Western mentality informed by Cartesianism becomes associated with pure rationality and homogeneity; it imposes predictability and foreseeability upon reality. Since religious categories such as God/Spirit resist such predictability, such categories are relegated to the domain of subjectivity, irrationality, implausibility, and the exotic.⁴⁵ In modernity the Holy Spirit matters little less than an empty promise and an intellectual construct, a by-product of mental fiction and fantasy. Without a doubt it is in part on this axis that the entire subsequent history of Western modern thought revolves. And where the question of God/Spirit is eclipsed, human beings easily become gods, and for that matter, tyrannical

⁴² For more detail see Descartes, *Philosophical Writings*, eds. Elizabeth Anscombe et al., especially second and sixth *Meditations*; Peter J. Markie, “The Cogito and Its Importance” in *Descartes’s Meditations: Critical Essays*, ed. Vere Chappell (Lanham, New York, Boulder, and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1997), 33-63.

⁴³ Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 10.

⁴⁴ Beginning with Descartes, modernity effectuated “a clear dividing line between the inner and the outer, with an inward realm of private subjectivity marked off clearly from the outward realm of secular public objectivity. The internalization of such dichotomies in modern religious thought has yielded enormous pressure towards associating ‘Spirit’ with the private realm of inward subjectivity, as well as towards a hierarchical ranking of the inner and the outer. The inner world of the private self has been identified as the authentic locus of contact with transcendence, while bodily disciplines, ritual forms, and outward practices seem always to attract the adjective ‘mere’ to mark their lower significance for the life of the Spirit.” All this led to the modern provincialization of the God/Spirit question. See Fergus Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein* (Oxford and New York: Blackwell, 1986).

⁴⁵ Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*, trans. John F. Hoffmeyer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 15.

and oppressive gods as was witnessed by the succeeding centuries. With the Cartesian self positing of subjectivity, God becomes merely a sublimation or projection of the human subject in the philosophy of Feuerbach. But as has become obvious from the preceding section, the way was already paved for this autonomous self-positing of the modern subject way back in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

1.3.2 David Hume

Although Descartes, the father of modern Western rationalism locates the basis of knowledge in his theory of innatism, Hume (1711-1776), taking his cue from John Locke, the father of empiricism, situates the basis of knowledge in his theory of “impressions.”⁴⁶ Knowledge actually comes about by the association of different ideas arising from the impressions in the mind. This comes about due to the power of the mind to combine, compound, transpose, and augment the different ideas emanating from the impressions afforded us by the senses. For example, to think of a golden mountain for Hume is merely to combine two ideas, *gold* and *mountain*, ideas with which we are already acquainted. The exercise of mixing and composing reality thus belongs alone to the mind. Following this line of thinking, therefore, Hume asserts that, “the idea of God, as meaning an infinitely intelligent, wise, and good Being, arises from reflecting on the operations of our own mind, and augmenting, without limit, those qualities of goodness and wisdom.”⁴⁷ In

⁴⁶ By *impressions*, Hume refers to perceptions originating from sensation. In this case, Hume means specifically the perceptions in themselves independent of any reference to their causal relation to their originating sources. Hence, Hume is not interested in the how or the manner in which those perceptions are produced in the human mind but merely in the perceptions themselves. He distinguishes *impressions* from *ideas/thoughts* in the sense that the latter are the products of reflection on the former and of which we become conscious. And for Hume, the most vivacious thought is still inferior to the dullest impression.

⁴⁷ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Eric Steinberg (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), 11.

this way, God is no longer viewed as a supernatural reality but merely as a construction of the mind. And since the idea of Spirit appears abstract, faint, and obscure, all that one is required to do is to enquire from what impression the supposed idea is derived; and where it is impossible to assign any, then such an idea must be held suspect or to be erroneous. Hume holds that this manner of knowing is universal. It is important to note that the universality Hume refers to here is distinctive only of Europeans.

Thus, Hume maintains that some categories of people, because of their natural deficiency in terms of intelligence, may not be able to compose such ideas just as a blind man cannot form the idea of colors and a deaf man the idea of sound. But if you restore either of them the sense in which they are deficient, then they will be able to form the ideas. Extrapolating from this, Hume conceives negroes as naturally intellectually deficient and unable to form great and universal ideas. But what emerges to view is that once the Humean claim to universality is denied a certain group of people, then it is no longer universal. Hume writes in the footnote to his essay “On National Character”:

I am apt to suspect the Negroes to be naturally inferior to whites. There scarcely ever was a civilized nation of that complexion, nor even any individual eminent in action or speculation. No ingenious manufacturers, no arts, no sciences. On the other hand, the most rude and barbarous of the whites... have still something eminent about them.... Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen... if nature had not made original distinction betwixt these breeds of men.⁴⁸

What is significant to note here is how this Humean philosophical framing of “difference” placed African humanity outside the realm of “normal” (European) humanity. Hume not only imposes his naïvely conceived notion of inferiority on

⁴⁸ Cited in Emmanuel C. Eze, “Modern Western Philosophy and African Colonialism,” in *African Philosophy: An Anthology*, ed. Emmanuel C. Eze (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 214.

Africans, but what is even more absurd is his simplistic conclusion that the purported inferiority is natural. Armed with such conclusion, Hume holds that just like the blind man who can form universal ideas only by the healing and restoration of his deficient sense, so the negroes can become capable of intelligence only by conquest and colonialism. This type of philosophically formulated bias against Africans easily became the stock-in-trade within the circle of European modern philosophers. This marks the metaphysical negation of the difference, the identity, and humanity of the non-European “other.”

1.3.3 Immanuel Kant

The Cartesian enthronement of subjectivity over and against all traditional authority and sources of knowledge, as well as the severance of the supernatural from the natural in the explanation of the constitution of the order of the world was further radicalized by Kant (1724-1804). While for Descartes, the principal philosophical question is subjectivity, for Kant, it becomes an epistemological question. For Kant, the philosophical problem becomes: how does reality relate to the subjective processes of consciousness? In order to resolve this problem, Kant rejected both the rationalism of Descartes (including Leibniz and Spinoza) and the empiricism of Hume (including Locke and Berkeley). In their place, Kant rather sought a method that would guarantee the limits and use of reason. In his *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant challenged the possibility of human reason knowing noumenal realities, or *Ding an sich*, the “thing-in-itself” such as the existence and nature of God, the immortality of the soul, and freedom. According to him, human reason can only know phenomena. Devising his famous Copernican revolution as a strategy to move beyond the problems of metaphysics, Kant

compares his own anthropocentrism in philosophy and Copernicus' heliocentrism in astronomy.⁴⁹

According to Kant then, human experience and reasoning are limited to phenomena. But knowledge of phenomena is obtained not simply through sense perception. Kant holds that the human mind possesses *a priori* structures (that is, logically prior to the materials they synthesize and unify) which constitute the necessary components of the human mind. These synthetic *a priori* forms not only synthesize and unify the data of sense, they, in fact, constitute the necessary conditions of experience, and are valid in experience only. Since their validity is confined to experience only, these *a priori* structures cannot be applied to objects transcending experience. Since to be known is to appear in consciousness, noumenal reality cannot be known by pure reason. Kant's critical philosophy disavowed the possibility of metaphysics. The intuition of God cannot be given in sense perception since the idea of God cannot be given in cognition *a priori*. Therefore, such noumenal realities as God and Spirit, likewise other metaphysical concepts, are rationally unknown and unknowable by pure reason. Since it is possible to think what is not known or knowable, noumena are

⁴⁹ Kant sees the progress achieved in mathematics and the natural sciences as the consequence of the revolution in the ways of thinking in those spheres of knowledge, and, therefore, presses that such approach be imitated in metaphysics. Hitherto, according to Kant, "it has been assumed that all our cognition must conform to the objects; but all attempts to find out something about them *a priori* through concepts that would extend our cognition have, on this presupposition, come to nothing. Hence let us once try whether we do not get farther with the problems of metaphysics by assuming that the objects must conform to our cognition, which would agree better with the requested possibility of an *a priori* cognition of them, which is to establish something about objects before they are given to us. This would be just like the first thoughts of Copernicus, who, when he did not make good progress in the explanation of celestial motions if he assumed that the entire celestial host revolves around the observer, tried to see if he might not have greater success if he made the observer revolve and left the stars at rest. Now in metaphysics, we can try in a similar way regarding the *intuition* of objects." See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Preface to 2nd ed., trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Bxvi, 110.

thought but not known.⁵⁰ The notion of God, for Kant, can only be posited by practical reason in order to guarantee the ground for moral discourse. The Kantian understanding of the “practical” merely associates the Spirit with a cipher for enabling the engagement of moral and spiritual valuation. The result becomes an autonomous morality grounded on subjective convictions with no reference to the reality of the objectivity of God’s being. Reality as such no longer has any relation to God except only as it is posited by the aprioristic categories of the human mind. For Kant, the question of God or the Spirit is a sterile and dull discourse. Hence, the Spirit of God was domesticated and simply reduced to human consciousness as a cipher for guaranteeing the religio-ethical ideals of the Kantian kingdom of ends and universal brotherhood of man. With the elimination of God from rational discourse, the Cartesian *cogito* becomes the Kantian autonomous self-legislating subject who legislates for himself or herself (and not dependent on any outside source of verity, lest there be heteronomy) universal and universalizable categorical imperatives. The point being made here is not that Kant’s categorical imperatives are non-rational. Rather, it is that, for Kant, they are allegedly purely rational (that is, based on rationality qua rationality), disengaged from any concrete tradition, delocalized, and having a zero-point neutrality and objectivity for every rational subject. But it remains a truism that this Kantian perspective is necessarily grounded in the tradition of liberalism. As such, it is not really free-floating as Kant is wont to suggest. With Kant as with Descartes, the certainty of truth no longer depends upon the relation and interaction between things and the subject but upon the structures of consciousness and the mind. American Ethicist, Stanley Hauerwas captures the

⁵⁰ See Putti, *Theology as Hermeneutics*, 90-1.

ramifications of the situation when he writes: “Ethics now becomes an autonomous area of human behavior that can be distinguished from religion and etiquette. Just as we can only know X or Y is true insofar as we are able to divorce our knowing from any concrete tradition, so morality can only be a correlative of an account of rationality qua rationality.”⁵¹ Indeed, with Kant, ethics or morality must now be relegated to the space of the autonomous. By the same token, religion (and, therefore, God/Spirit-talk) is henceforth relegated to the domain of the private.

With the Kantian anthropologization of metaphysics and autonomous morality, the human subject becomes properly the “*homo mensura*.”⁵² Without doubt the beginning point of Kant’s categorical imperative is the dignity and freedom of the human person. The imperative is expressed in two forms. The first is: “Act only according to a maxim by which you can at the same time will that it shall become a universal law.”⁵³ And the second is: “Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but

⁵¹ Stanley Hauerwas, *After Christendom? How the Church Is to Behave If Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation Are Bad Ideas* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1999), 29.

⁵² “*Homo mensura*” meaning “man is the measure of all things” refers to the claim of the character, Protagoras, in Plato’s *Theaetetus*. See Plato, *Theaetetus*, 152aff. Plato uses this claim to argue that true knowledge is grounded in being rather than rooted merely in the fleeting perceptions of the knower. But in modernity, this Platonic insight has been relativized through the replacement of God with the modern subject. The modern subject now creates his own truths and values to suit himself from the immanence of his own interiority. Although the modern subject conceives his own truths and values common to all humankind and thus, universal, he fails to understand that there are no such presuppositionless universal truths as they are always underpinned and colored by cultural root-metaphors and particular linguistic contents and conventions. Indeed, it is even relativistic to absolutize one particular contextual form of knowledge and make it universal.

⁵³ Immanuel Kant, *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. Thomas K. Abbott (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1949), 260.

always at the same time as an end.”⁵⁴ To be sure, these Kantian categorical imperatives seem to give due priority to the human person in the moral order, in the social intercourse with others. It goes without saying, however, that these Kantian maxims were merely formalistic and good only *de jure*. *De facto* in concrete existential situation, the maxims with their orchestration of one’s freedom and that of others who should never be treated as means to an end but as ends in themselves, fell flat in Kant’s discourse on race. The scope of the humanity which should be treated with dignity and respect, whether in one’s own person or in the person of any other appears in Kant to be limited to only European humanity.

With the enthronement of the Kantian autonomous subject, the self-legislating individual universalizes his interior cognitions and imposes them on the other outside of himself. Small wonder Nietzsche unmistakably declares the death of God⁵⁵ as a mark of the decadence of both modernity and Christianity. Truly, along with the “death of God” also comes the death of humanity and its inalienable rights and freedom, as well as the obliteration of difference. The purported Kantian (Western) universal rationality became the yardstick and the norm for judging others who are different. Hume who Kant acknowledges as the one who woke him from his dogmatic slumber is directly appealed to by Kant in his discourse on race. Thus Kant asserts that “so fundamental is the difference between the two races of men (following Hume who claims that negroes are naturally inferior to whites), and it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities

⁵⁴ Ibid., 271.

⁵⁵ For more on the death of God, see Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, ed. W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974); *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1966).

as in color.”⁵⁶ For Kant, therefore, a clear proof of the evidence of rational capacity or the lack of it becomes skin color (white or black).⁵⁷ In keeping with this particular Western conception of universal rationality, the position of Kant further justifies colonialism and slavery on the grounds of the supposed inferiority of negroes to whites. Kant’s claim that, “I am never to act otherwise than so that I could also will that my maxim should be become a universal law,” proves duplicitous since he (Kant) would not wish that anyone should dehumanize him.

1.3.4 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

In the wake of classical theism culminating in modern philosophical theism which introduced a hiatus between the supernatural and the natural, Hegel (1770-1831) comes on board to once again recover the question of spirit (*Geist*) and spirit-language. He actually sees himself at the explicit beginning of a shift from substance ontology which dominated the medieval and early modern period to a philosophy of spirit. Hegel is said to be the first to characterize his philosophical approach as a phenomenology. He realizes this by conceptualizing reality not as “Being-in-Itself” (as substance) but as “Being-for-Itself” (as Absolute Spirit). In his *magnum opus*, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel asserts:

everything turns on grasping and expressing the True, not only as *Substance*, but equally *Subject*.... Further, the living Substance is being which is in

⁵⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Observations*, trans. John T. Goldthwait (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 110-11. See also Richard H. Popkin, “Hume’s Racism,” *The Philosophical Forum* 9, nos. 2-3 (Winter-Spring 1977-8): 218, for Kant’s remarks.

⁵⁷ See Eze, “Modern Western Philosophy,” in *African Philosophy*, 214.

truth Subject, or, what is the same, is in truth actual only insofar as it is the movement of positing itself, or is the mediation of its self-othering with itself.⁵⁸

Hegel thus conceives being as *Geist* and as movement which posits itself, becoming other with itself or as a relation to itself. The contour of this movement is a triadic dialectic between thesis and antithesis which resolves itself in a synthesis, and which in turn becomes another thesis. The dialectic moves from identity to the negation of that identity, then to a negation of the negation at which point the Spirit achieves a synthetic reconciliation. In this unfolding movement, Spirit posits itself in each moment towards its goal of becoming the Absolute Spirit. In the different moments of Spirit's unfolding movement, every reality becomes a self-expression or manifestation of Spirit.⁵⁹ The Absolute Spirit—which is the highest synthesis—is the apex and fullest expression of Spirit's movement in relating to or becoming itself. The Hegelian Spirit thus becomes the necessary ontological unification of all reality and the ultimate principle of all rationality. Because all reality is the necessary expression or unfolding of the Absolute Spirit, according to Hegel's conceptualization, then, even creation becomes a necessary

⁵⁸ Georg W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), §§ 17, 18.

⁵⁹ It is instructive to note that in the Hegelian dialectic, the finite is posited only as a necessary "moment" of Absolute Spirit such that the negation of its determinateness is necessary for the unfolding and the becoming of the being of Absolute Spirit; thus Absolute Spirit becomes the all-encompassing foundation of all reality. Such negation and assimilation of all into Absolute Spirit show no regard for the alterity of the other as other. The Hegelian Absolute Spirit conceptually does not transcend but is transfixed within the dialectic process because it itself constitutes that process in an absolute way. Hence, going by this Hegelian construal, the world is not a free creation of God distinct from Godself but a necessary moment in the realization of the being of Absolute Spirit. There can, therefore, never be any true relation between Absolute Spirit and the other (world) since such relation is possible only where the otherness of the other is truly regarded. As Emmanuel Levinas writes, "The Other as Other is not only an alter ego: the Other is what I myself am not. The Other is this, not because of the Other's character, or physiognomy, or psychology, but because of the Other's very alterity." See Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 83. The Other therefore, cannot merely be a projection of Absolute Spirit. Also see Hill, *The Three-Personed God*, 150-5.

creation. Again, because everything eventually becomes the Absolute Spirit, the Hegelian spirit is totalizing and assimilating.⁶⁰ This Hegelian position representing the height of the articulation of German Idealism⁶¹ is problematic on further examination.

In a move from Kantian subjectivity to history, Hegel extrapolated from his Spirit philosophical concept and applied it to his understanding of history and humanity. Hegel sees history and humanity as the phenomenal dialectic of the self unfolding and expression of *Geist* within consciousness. For Hegel then, European humanity, culture, and historicity constitute the highest and fullest phenomenal manifestation of *Weltgeist* (world-spirit and world-historical process). European humanity becomes not only universal but the avatar and the norm of humanity as such. This Hegelian view, as Kirsteen Kim rightly suggests: “tended to tie the Spirit to Western civilization as representing the best ethical standards, the most developed consciousness, and the highest reaches of human development.”⁶² The movement of the Spirit was not considered to be evidenced in cultures other than the European. Understood in this light, different categories or species of humanity other than the European came to be depicted

⁶⁰ For a critical and explicit repudiation of Hegel’s totalizing spirit philosophy, see Steven G. Smith, *The Concept of the Spiritual: An Essay in First Philosophy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988). See also Welker, *God The Spirit*, esp. 47.

⁶¹ Hegel attempted to overcome the Kantian dualism between phenomena and noumena. Hegel sees phenomena not only as the constructs of the mind but also as the fabric of noumena. Consequently, there are such unknown things-in-themselves to be thought of in isolation from phenomena. Phenomena thus revealed all there is to be revealed. In this way, Hegel aimed to re-link knowledge to objectivity. But unfortunately, Hegel, by conceiving phenomena as moments in the trajectory of the dialectical process of the Mind (*Geist*), lapsed into the reduction of the objectivity of reality and the world into the subjectivity of the *Geist*. In this way, Hegel reconstitutes and re-inscribes Kantian idealism that he set out to overcome *ab initio*. See Putti, *Theology as Hermeneutics*, 90-1.

⁶² Kirsteen Kim, *The Holy Spirit in the World: A Global Conversation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2007), 7.

as sub-human. In his *Lectures on Philosophy of History*,⁶³ Hegel placed Africa outside the historical beginning of the unfolding of *Geist*. Since the movement of spirit also entails the unfolding of rationality, and since Africans are outside of the history of spirit, Africans were thus depicted as lacking in rational thought and moral conduct, as cannibals with no laws, and as enmeshed in fetishism. Moreover, since European culture and humanity become the highest manifestation of *Geist*—which itself is essentially and necessarily totalizing and assimilating of everything in its unfolding movement—then colonial and capitalist expansionism becomes the logical necessity for the actualization of the purported universal European historicity and humanity.

Indeed, in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Right*, Hegel silhouettes in detail the theoretical architectonic that serves the justification and explication of colonialism as the ineluctable outcome of the unfolding of spirit in history (European, of course).⁶⁴ Because Africans have been depicted as irrational, it is unsurprising that Hegel denies them rights as he clearly points out: “the civilized nation (and by this, Europe) is conscious that the rights of the barbarians (Africans) are unequal to its own and treats their autonomy as only a formality.”⁶⁵ By thus negating at the metaphysical level the cultural difference and humanity/historicity of the non-European African other, Europe is able to posit the particularity and specificity of its own culture, historicity, and thus its

⁶³ Cited in Eze, “Modern Western Philosophy,” in *African Philosophy*, 215.

⁶⁴ See Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 150. For more detail, see also *The Essential Writings*, ed., F. Weiss (New York: Harper Books, 1974); Tsenay Serequeberhan, “The Idea of Colonialism in Hegel’s Philosophy of Right,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 29, no. 3 (Sept. 29, 1989): 302-18.

⁶⁵ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 219.

own humanity as the ideal one. Whereas Europe represented itself as the ideal of rationality and its understanding of spirit (God) as the only possible way, irrationality and savagery, primitivism and fetishism were philosophically projected unto Africa. Whereas Africans are demonized as half-devils and denigrated as half-children, Africa then required the putative civilizing and Christianizing colonialism of European soldiers and missionaries to dominate it, exorcise it, impose order, law, and morality, and bring the child to maturity using the European as the norm of human existence as such. For Hegel, Africans as sub-humans deserved to be enslaved in order to benefit them by cross-pollinating them with European rationality, culture, and morality. The negation of the humanity and the cultural difference of the African other aptly capture the violence and oppressiveness that characterized the colonial, capitalist, and missionary expansion of Europe.

All in all, Hegel's attempt to recover spirit philosophically veered toward dialecticism which degenerated into the abstraction of absolute spirit and with the dialecticism collapsing into totalization and domination of the other. The absolutization of European humanity and historicity constitute a certain form of idolatry. Such idolatry entails the absolutization of a finite reality—European humanity, nation, race, and so forth. As Kasper notes: "Such an absolutization...does in fact by its nature lead to morally reprehensible actions and to the alienation not only to human beings from God but of human beings from one another and of the individual from himself."⁶⁶ This Hegelian construal became recycled among many subsequent European philosophers who simply reinstated and re-inscribed it without much originality.

⁶⁶ Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 48.

1.3.5 Auguste Comte

The revolution began by Descartes to account for the natural world with no causal relation to God found expansion in later positivist and evolutionary theories. Auguste Comte devised positivism as a rational and scientific foundation for ethics and social system. Of particular interest to us here is Comtean social philosophy. Comte conceives that in the development of social and political organization, humans have to go through three stages which he identifies as: the *theological*, the *metaphysical*, and the *positive*. Accordingly, during the theological stage, humans on account of their ignorance and haste to organize society based their first moral order and social discipline on a theological explication of the universe by referring the constitution of nature to a supreme Creator of the world. For Comte, the trajectory of the theological is from Fetishism to Polytheism and then to Monotheism. Comte views this contour from Fetishism through Polytheism to Monotheism as really the gradual withdrawal of theological explication of the universe to pave way for a more general and abstract approach—the metaphysical. Metaphysical abstractions which were taken to be real entities thus substituted the theological transcendent explanation of the universe. But for Comte, even the metaphysical was merely disguising the abandonment of all transcendent explanations whatsoever, while charting the course for the burgeoning strength of positive science for positive explanations of the universe. Comte concludes that in the existing order of the universe, the cause of phenomena is not supernatural but natural. Thus, God, the Spirit, and the spiritual no longer have any relation to the material world. To backtrack a little bit, in the Comtean exposition of the theological stage, certain so-called races were identified as belonging to that milieu. Particularly, Comte says: “we are not aware that in

any tribe of savages or negroes who have been observed, Fetishism has been found totally unmixed with polytheism, and it is probable that the two coexisted from the earliest period.”⁶⁷ Thus, in his social philosophy, Comte conceives that society courses through a certain trajectory from: magic through religion to positive science; from promiscuity through matrilineal to patrilineal system of family, and from savagery through barbarism to civilization. The enormous influence of this Comtean view of the so-called “savages” on later Western philosophers, colonizers, anthropologists, and even Christian missionaries, cannot be overemphasized.

1.3.6 Herbert Spencer

Spencer revolutionized sociology through the extension of Charles Darwin’s evolutionary theory. Taking Darwin and the intellectual climate of the late mid-nineteenth century as his point of departure, Spencer posits that the “law determining the effects of contact of species [both intra and inter], races, varieties [and so forth,] among many animals may be summed up under the formula of ‘the struggle for life [existence] and the survival of the fittest.’”⁶⁸ Spencer was the first to use the expression “the survival of the fittest” and applied it to social evolution.⁶⁹ Although, Darwin may have had a socio-political agenda in his theory of evolution, he concentrated more on biological evolution. It was Spencer and his cronies who, however, popularized what in the middle

⁶⁷ Cited in John Stuart Mill, *Auguste Comte and Positivism* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1961), 19; For more detail see Auguste Comte, *A General View of Positivism*, trans. J. H. Bridges (Stanford, California: Academic Reprints, 1900); Edward Caird, *The Social Philosophy and Religion of Comte* (London and New York: Macmillan and Co., 1968), 1-55.

⁶⁸ See Mike Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860-1945: Nature as Model and Nature as Threat* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 82.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

of the nineteenth century came to be known as social Darwinism which played a very significant part, and not without unparalleled but unfortunate ramifications, in the history of social and political ideas. Spencer transposed the evolutionary concept of adaptation from biology to sociology. He agrees with Darwin that the relationship between organisms (predators and preys) in the light of the availability of the means of subsistence and the condition of the environment was an incessant cause of mutual adaptation which produced improvements in senses and organs.⁷⁰ In this struggle and rivalry for resources between organisms which engender adaptation and the growth of organs, the organisms that fail to adapt or improve their organs face extinction by natural selection, whereas “successful modifications were inherited by subsequent generations, leading to cumulative and progressive development.”⁷¹

Just like all organisms, Spencer conceives warfare as analogous to predation among animals with the potential of engendering the survival of the fittest and the strongest. Although violent aggression and warfare between societies were not to be permanent, they evolve into what Spencer calls the industrial war which, nevertheless, sustains the survival of the fittest: “after this stage [of violent aggression] has been reached, the purifying process, continuing still an important one, remains to be carried on by industrial war – by a competition of societies during which the best, physically, emotionally, and intellectually, spread most, and leave the least capable to disappear

⁷⁰ Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, abridged, ed. S. Andreski (London: Macmillan, 1969), 176-7; *The Study of Sociology*, 7th ed. (London: Kegan Paul, 1878), 192.

⁷¹ Herbert Spencer, *Man Versus the State*, ed. D. Macrae (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), 133; Hawkins, *Social Darwinism*, 85.

gradually.”⁷² In this way, Spencer constructed two distinct models of human interaction in the process of social organization in the world—the militant and the industrial—and both of which are the by-products of the distinct stages of the evolving human nature.⁷³ According to his conception of the different stages of human evolution, Spencer distinguished between the higher race and the lower race, with the former always assuming control because advanced and superior and the latter always subordinated because inferior, and like savages, remained fixed at primitive evolutionary levels. Spencer characterized the so-called lower and primitive race with the traits of a child. The members of the barbarous race, due to their rudimentary moral and intellectual capabilities had no concept of abstract ideas including any conception of truth, while their imagination is but poorly developed.⁷⁴ Thus, the so-called negro race was conceived as still in childhood and, hence, constitutionally incapable of looking after itself as it has not yet learned to walk alone in the paths of civilization.⁷⁵ These characters of the lower race, like the negro, which indicate that it is at the primitive or early stage of evolution, warrant that slavery was appropriate for its subordination. Spencer opined that for the continued survival of the higher race, war, brute force, and aggression were required to facilitate the creation of larger social units through conquest and slavery to benefit the higher race. Thus, through force, smaller groups were to be wielded into larger tribes and the latter

⁷² Spencer, *The Study of Sociology*, 199.

⁷³ Herbert Spencer, *On Social Evolution: Selected Writings*, ed. J. D. Y. Peel (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1972), 149-66.

⁷⁴ Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Psychology*, 2 vols., 3rd ed. (London: Williams and Norgate, 1890), II, 523, 527-33.

⁷⁵ Hawkins, *Social Darwinism*, 202.

into small, and then large, nations. These developments were also to engender the expansion of morality which Spencer claims the savages are incapable of in the first place.⁷⁶ From the foregoing, it is obvious to see how the construction of Social Darwinism has been harnessed as an expository device to justify imperialist ideological policies that have oppressed, marginalized, and negated the humanity, cultural difference, and historicity of the African other.

1.3.7 Placide Tempels

In 1945, Father Placide Tempels, a Belgian missionary who worked for many years in the Democratic Republic of Congo wrote a book entitled *Bantu Philosophy*.⁷⁷ Tempels' aim was to furnish the colonial rulers and missionaries with an understanding of indigenous African "philosophy." Equipped with such an understanding, he hoped it would be easier to implant the missionary message and civilizational project right into the subjectivity and interiority of Africans in a more sustainable fashion. Tempels' work is thus predominantly an exposition of the Baluba (an ethnic group in Congo) ontology which grounded and regulated the daily ethical, political, economic, and religious existence of Baluba Africans. Although, one of Tempels' objectives was to enable the success of European colonial missionary and civilisational enterprise in Africa, his work holds great significance for African thought specifically his use of "philosophy" (ethno-philosophy) to characterize African ontology. Tempels conceived the Bantu world as undergirded by "vital-force" which can be strengthened or diminished. The Bantu's daily struggle appears to be to overcome other forces that may diminish this vital force.

⁷⁶ Spencer, *The Study of Sociology*, 195; *On Social Evolution*, 167-74; Hawkins, *Social Darwinism*, 92.

⁷⁷ Placide Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy* (Paris: Présence Africain, 1959).

As it has become obvious from the preceding sections, nearly all European philosophers, anthropologists, sociologists, and even ecclesiastics spoke of Africans in terms of savage mentality, incapability of rational thought, and a lack of moral content. Others managed to speak of primitive thought that is permanently fixed at the lowest rung of the evolutionary scale. In his groundbreaking book, Tempels spoke, however, of philosophy, a term which to the Western mind symbolizes the highest exercise of reason. The book's title by default amounted to an admission of the existence of an African reason; and by inference, the existence of an African humanity. However, since Tempels could not completely extricate himself from the intellectual climate of the time, he only recognized African Traditional Religion (hereafter ATR) as some form of primitive monotheism. This recognition is very much akin to the Comtean sense of paving way for something higher and better.⁷⁸ Valentin Mudimbe is probably correct in saying that "Perhaps one should also evaluate Tempels's enterprise within the context of an era in which Lévy-Bruhl's dogmas were congruent with the colonizing objectives as well as with the Christian mission expressed in an evolutionary grid."⁷⁹ For Tempels, Bantu's vitalistic (non-static) world-view was to be assimilated into European thought and culture which became synonymous with the Christian tradition in order to become perfected and civilized. Religious language within the missionary context in Africa became transcoded for imperial and assimilationist purposes. Hence, Tempels could say: "our civilizing

⁷⁸ Although, Tempels does not refer to Comte, I am only positing a similarity between them.

⁷⁹ V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), 140.

mission alone can justify our occupation of the lands of uncivilized peoples.”⁸⁰ Tempels has his critics especially from the Bantu hermeneutical and linguistic school who accuse him of establishing equivalence between force and being as a simulacrum.⁸¹ For such critics, the framework adopted by Tempels makes the Bantu force unthinkable without instrumentalizing Western conceptuality. This is as Tempels himself grants, that “Bantu ontology can be thought of and made explicit only because of the conceptual frame of Western philosophy.” “It is we [Europeans] who will be able to tell them [the Bantu Africans] in precise terms, what their inmost concept of being is.”⁸²

By and large, Tempels is not without disciples. His work has inspired significant philosophical and theological production in the Bantu nations (in the Central African region). Such disciples include Rwandan philosopher, Alexis Kagamé, and pioneer African (Congolese) theologians, Vincent Mulago, Tharcisse Tshibangu, etc.⁸³ They have argued for the pertinence of Tempels’ insights particularly with regard to the question of dynamism (how every created being is an active dynamic force in interaction with a

⁸⁰ Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, 171-2.

⁸¹ Among such critics of Tempels are: Ntumba Tshiamalenga, “La Philosophie dans la situation actuelle de l’Afrique,” *Combats pour un Christianisme africain* (Kinshasa: Faculté de Théologie Catholique, 1981), 179, cited in Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, 140. See also Tshiamalenga, “Langues bantu et philosophie. Le cas du ciluba,” *La Philosophie Africaine* I:147-58 (Kinshasa: Faculté de Théologie Catholique, 1977); Okot p’Bitek, *Africa’s Cultural Revolution* (Nairobi: Macmillan, 1973), 59; F. Eboussi-Boulaga, “Le Bantou Problematique,” *Présence Africaine* no. 66 (1968):4-40.

⁸² Ibid., 36. See also Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, 139.

⁸³ See Alexis Kagamé, *La Philosophie bantu-rwandaise de l’être* (Brussels: Academie Royale des Sciences Coloniales, 1956); idem, “La Place de Dieu et de l’homme dans la religion des Bantu,” *Cahiers des religions Africaines* 4 (1968): 213-22 and 5 (1969): 5-11; Vincent Mulago, *L’Union Vitale Bantu, ou le Principe de Cohesion de la Communauté chez les Bashi, les Banyarwanda et les Barundi* (Rome: Annali Lateranensi XX, 1956); see also Bénézet Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, trans. John O’Donohue (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006), esp. 56-8.

multitude of other forces and each influencing one another), life-force perpetuating lineage, family (*Jamaa*), and community. Again, a group of African priests published *Des Prêtres Noirs s'interrogent* (Paris, 1956) which drew on the achievements of *Negritude* and *African Personality* while incorporating Tempels' philosophical insights.

At any rate, the unmitigated colonial violence (occupation) with its economic, political, and its other concomitant forms of exploitation was delusionally validated under the guise of a civilizing and Christianizing mission. Thus, in colonizing, Christian Europe saw itself as carrying out the divine mandate to spread the faith to all parts of the world and to impose on all, God's law as incarnated by European culture.⁸⁴ To accomplish these, God, therefore, legitimates the employment of all possible means including the use of violence.

1.4 Appraisal of Modernity and its Promised Utopia

By way of synopsis, Kasper clearly accedes that the reasons for the eclipse of the Spirit in modern Western tradition lie in the intellectual climate of the time. According to him, "after the passing of Goethe, Hegel, and Schleiermacher this philosophy of spirit suddenly collapsed. Since that time the idealist interpretation of spirit has largely yielded the field to a materialistic and evolutionary interpretation."⁸⁵ Kasper goes on to say:

reality is no longer viewed as a manifestation of spirit, but rather spirit is understood as an epiphenomenon of reality, being conceived as a superstructure built on the economic and social process or as a surrogate and sublimation of man who is defined as a being made up of needs. Finally, a positivist and

⁸⁴ Tsenay Serequeberhan excellently explores this colonial civilizing and Christianizing dynamics. See Tsenay Serequeberhan, "Colonialism and the Colonized: Violence and Counter-violence," in *African Philosophy: An Anthology*, ed. Emmanuel C. Eze (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 236.

⁸⁵ Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 199.

supposedly ‘exact’ understanding of science demanded the renunciation of the concept of ‘spirit’ because of its multiplicity of meanings and the impossibility of providing an exact definition of it; it demanded that we remain silent regarding that which we cannot define with precision.⁸⁶

Such evolutionary and positivistic progress became a utopian vision which transformed into oppressive binarisms between superior and inferior, civilized and savage, white and black, higher and lower, advanced and fixed, better and worse, mature and childish, and so on. These binarisms which were determined by the presence of physical, physiognomic, and psychic characteristics were hammered out merely on the anvil of unrealistic theories that ignored the data of experience of the victimized; they became the barometers used to calibrate the racial worth of African peoples, institutions, and socio-cultural organizations.

Whenever the formulation of God/Spirit-language is crafted in complete metaphysical abstraction or is substituted by wholesale subjectivity, it often leads to dualism—either between spirit and body or a thoroughgoing dualism between the divine Spirit and humans which in turn places the *imago Dei* under erasure. In the case of the latter, the divine Spirit/God becomes merely a sublimated subjectivity. We see this process which radically started with Descartes through Kant, and all the way to Hegel, become theoretically formulated in Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872). Feuerbach opines that the notion of God is just a projection of man’s desire for infinity on to God; hence, “man makes a god of what he is not but would like to be.”⁸⁷ The indelible importance of Feuerbach is obvious, for instance, in K. Marx, J.-P. Sartre, M. Merleau-Ponty, but

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ludwig Feuerbach, *Lectures on the Essence of Religion*, ed. R. Manheim (New York: 1967), 234. For more on this, see also *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Torchbooks, 1967).

expressed most aptly in Sigmund Freud's (1856-1939) psychoanalytic explication of religion. A sublimated subjectivity in turn asserts "will to power" in order to lord it over others. If there is any diagnostic index of modern culture, it is clearly the "death of God." But the displacement of God always entails a replacement with human ideology.

As John Paul II notes, beginning with the Enlightenment through Descartes to post-Cartesian era, man (Western) has remained alone: "alone as creator of his own history and his own civilization; alone as one who decides what is good and what is bad, as one who would exist and operate *etsi Deus non daretur*, even if there were no God." Put another way, the modern autonomous subject can know as true only phenomena which are given within the matrix of consciousness, thus all noumenal realities, including God or Spirit, can only be postulates as demanded for moral conduct. In this connection, because God becomes only a postulate, modernity creates a social order in which ethics is dependent on the autonomy of the individual subjectivity under the presumption that God does not exist or even if God exists, the autonomous individual must live as if God does not matter. Continuing, the Pope clearly and logically argues that "if man can decide by himself, without God, what is good and what is bad, he can also determine that a group of people is to be annihilated [and by extension through the violence of slavery and colonialism]."⁸⁸ Thus, where sublimated human subjectivity becomes God, then the death of God and the death of humans, to a large extent, go together. As Badcock underscores, "The preachers of freedom, in short, have not delivered their promised utopia. Indeed, quite the reverse has occurred. The age of freedom has been the single greatest era of

⁸⁸ John Paul II, *Memory and Identity: Conversations at the Dawn of a Millennium* (Milan: Rizzoli International Publications, 2006), 30.

human barbarity in history.”⁸⁹ It is crystal clear especially from the historical events during the twentieth century that the purported ideal of freedom as construed by modern objective rationality has in fact been violently dehumanizing.

With the eclipse of God/Spirit, human freedom actually dies along with human inalienable rights. Civilization transmutes into barbarism. According to Chinua Achebe in “An Image of Africa,” citing Irish Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, the West uses Africa to define itself and to establish its own superiority as civilized as opposed to primitive Africa.⁹⁰ Showing how crucial this kind of constructed dialectic is to European self-definition, Edward Said notes, “if colonized people are irrational, Europeans are rational; if the former are barbaric, sensual, and lazy, Europe is civilization itself, with its sexual appetites under control and its dominant ethic that of hard work.”⁹¹ The goal of such dialectic is to portray the non-European other as not the kind of people that “we” (Europeans) are. With this “self-deceiving moral smugness,”⁹² the colossal brutality and violence that accompanied the colonial project were simply explained away to serve European interests.

Because the dialectical and dualistic philosophies spawned by the modernity/coloniality project failed to sustain the dualisms it created without collapsing into homogenization, assimilation, exclusion, and domination, they ended up serving the justification of colonialism and slavery of the African other. The language of “difference

⁸⁹ Badcock, *Light of Truth and Fire of Love*, 263.

⁹⁰ Chinua Achebe, *Hopes and Impediments* (London and New York: Doubleday, 1988).

⁹¹ Cited in Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 47.

⁹² Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1996), 58.

in kind” was introduced by Europeans “as a way of justifying unspeakable exploitation and denigration of Africans.”⁹³ The worst evil and “the most harmful harm” is often the one perpetrated against the other by the “good” [and the so called civilized] who have the luxury of power and the apparatus to exercise domination.⁹⁴ In the light of contemporary awareness of our pluralistic contexts and historical consciousness, it becomes necessary to broach a different category that is capable of enhancing a better appreciation and integration of “difference,” “identity,” and “alterity.” This work aims to establish that relational pneumatology would do just that. The recovery of relational pneumatology is even more urgent today as oppressive ideologies and new forms of marginalization have

⁹³ Eze, “Modern Western Philosophy” in *African Philosophy*, 219. See also Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 60. Again, Robert Young points out how the terms “civilized” and “savage” were used in a hierarchized binaristic fashion to sustain the rhetoric of European civilizing but oppressive and exploitative mission. Young recaptures Lord Lugard’s construal of European civilizing enterprise thus: “As Roman imperialism laid the foundations of modern civilization, and led the wild barbarians of these islands along the path of progress, so in Africa today we are repaying the debt, and bringing to the dark places of the earth, *the abode of barbarism and cruelty, the torch of culture* (emphasis mine) and progress, while ministering to the material needs of our own civilization.... We hold these countries because it is the genius of our race to colonize, to trade, and to govern.” See Fredrick J. D. Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1922), 618-19, in Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 29. What is curious in this understanding is the claim that the pre-colonial African other lacks culture and as such is the impersonation of barbarity and cruelty. This kind of construal is used as a negative expository device to portray the African other in bad light so as to justify the colonizing enterprise viewed from the European perspective as bringing the torch of culture to the savage African other. Here, European culture is seen to be synonymous with civilization. But as Young points out, “What is noticeable here is the historical movement whereby the externality of the category [of savagery/barbarity] against which culture [in the European sense] is defined is gradually turned inwards and becomes part of [the so-called] culture itself.” What else could this mean other than the fact that what is purported to be civilization and a civilizing mission is often a masked barbarism of apocalyptic proportion. Barbarism and cruelty partly become means through which the civilizing mission is executed. Indeed, civilization and barbarism are invariably entangled and interdependent, and, there is, as Young grants, “no document of civilization that is not at the same time a document of barbarism.” Ibid., 32.

⁹⁴ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1979), 100.

been reconstituted in other ways especially in the form of neocolonialism and globalization.

1.5 A New Turn to Pneumatology

Beginning from the second half of the twentieth century, ample evidence indicates an increasing attention to pneumatology from a smorgasbord of perspectives and traditions. This phenomenon has been described by some scholars as: “a new advent of the Spirit in both the theology and the life of the churches.”⁹⁵ This is not to imply that the Spirit has been completely absent. Rather, as has been abundantly made clear in the foregoing section, the Spirit who is the Lord and Giver of life, whose presence fills the whole world and the church, and who indwells humans, has for too long been neglected due to inadequate and unbalanced attention. Obviously, neo-Scholastic theology had so absorbed a static understanding of God inherited from classical Greek metaphysics that the dynamism and communal love that characterize the Triune God were lost sight of.⁹⁶ This work seeks to recover and explicate the relationality and self-giving love of the Triune God as it is actualized through the ceaseless activity and creativity of the Spirit, and what it may mean for relating to those regarded as other and for the construction of identity. This approach resonates with contemporary understanding of reality as no longer

⁹⁵ Hinze and Dabney, *Advents of the Spirit*, 17. Some excellent examples of theologians from the West who have tried to reposition pneumatology in its rightful place include: Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 3 vols., trans. David Smith (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1983), idem, *The Word and the Spirit*, trans. David Smith (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers and London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1986); Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997).

⁹⁶ Anthony Kelly, *The Trinity of Love: A Theology of the Christian God* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1989), 11.

a static and mechanistic entity constituted by disparate and atomized parts, but as a web of dynamic communion, interconnectedness, and complex relationships. It is redolent with the overall thrust of “Systems Theory,”⁹⁷ personalist philosophy, chaos theory, and above all, West African world-views which conceive relationality as a key characteristic of reality. The question then becomes how the Church may effectively safeguard both the identities of Africans—their cultural, socio-political, and religious difference—and the specificity of the Christian faith, and thus become a credible agent of change in the social transformation of Africa.

The Trinitarian communion of persons and self-giving love as effectuated by the Spirit serves as a paradigm for an understanding of identity in relation to otherness to be pursued in this work. The Spirit of fellowship safeguards the Persons of the Trinity from indulging in self-enclosed love. At the same time, the Spirit of fellowship and relationality who sustains the nonself-enclosed love of the persons of the Trinity creates space in God for fellowship with humanity, as well as fellowship and communion among humans. In the Trinity, as Miroslav Volf puts it, “The one divine person is not that person only, but includes the other divine persons in itself; it is what it is only through the indwelling of the others.”⁹⁸ Nevertheless, this mutual indwelling of the persons neither results to the dissolution of the particularity of the self into some form of indistinct

⁹⁷ Kelly points out that “Systems Theory” analyses and comprehends reality in a new light as capable of self-organization and self-transcendence, and hence, a field of interaction. See *Ibid.*, 12-15. Systems theory is traceable to Emmanuel Wallerstein who formulated it to account for how global capitalism has been driven by world economy under the aspects of world economic, social, and political structures and systems rather than by nation-states; such structuration includes: core, periphery, and semi-periphery which function in an interrelated and interconnected manner. For more on this see Emmanuel Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004).

⁹⁸ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 128.

identity nor the absorption of the others into the self, such that the self becomes all of reality. This paradigm of relational pneumatology will be explored subsequently with attention to its implications for Christian practice of relating to its neighbors and to those viewed as different. At this juncture, however, it is of decisive importance to clarify how the person of the Holy Spirit is to be understood herein.

1.5.1 The Person and *Proprium* of the Spirit

In various ways the idea of the identity and Person of the Holy Spirit had been relegated to a secondary position, if the Spirit is not even completely denied any personhood in Western theology. Besides the Latin tradition, one also finds this phenomenon to be prevalent in Process and certain Protestant Theologies, which in one way or another, wield influence on some Catholic theologies. Process Theology, for instance, views the Holy Spirit not as Person (as a distinct hypostasis in the mystery of the Triune God) but as a term to designate the necessary immanence of God in the world. The Spirit becomes simply a metaphor for expressing religiously an attribute of God's nature, as a "mode of God's universal presence" in the cosmos.⁹⁹

Again, Karl Barth, who, in some ways, influenced Karl Rahner, understands the Holy Spirit as a "mode of being" of God both in the inner-trinitarian relationship between the Father and the Son, and the realization of God's self-revelation in the human being. Put simply, the Holy Spirit is the event of divine self-relating. Barth's perspective not only leads to the eclipse of the Holy Spirit's distinct identity but is also beset by a

⁹⁹ See Hill, *The Three-Personed God*, 193.

modalist tendency.¹⁰⁰ Truly, Barth allots centrality to the Trinity in his theology, yet he “gives the appearance of thinking of God as a single Person existing in three unidentified modes.”¹⁰¹ Looking at the immanent Trinity in such agnostic manner has definitely landed some of Barth’s disciples into Unitarianism.¹⁰² In his critique of Barth, Robert Jenson reads that in Barth, the Holy Spirit is reduced to the power of Jesus Christ’s being; the Spirit is what happens when Jesus Christ exercises his power. In this way, the Spirit is explained as something rather than as someone.¹⁰³

Hendrikus Berkhof toes the line of Barth but introduces a nuance in the understanding of the Spirit as person. According to Berkhof:

The triune God does not embrace three persons; he himself is person, meeting us in the Son and in his Spirit. Jesus Christ is not a person beside the person of God. In him the person of God becomes the shape of a human person. And the Spirit is not a person beside the persons of God and Christ. In creation he [the Spirit] is the acting person of God, in re-creation he [the Spirit] is the acting person of Christ, who is no other than the acting person of God. Therefore, we must reject all presentation of the Spirit as an impersonal force. The Spirit is person because he is God acting as a person. He is a person in relation to us, not in relation to God; for he is the personal God himself in relation to us.¹⁰⁴

Berkhof’s affirmations seem to deny any genuine inner differentiation in the identity of the persons of the Trinity, and as such inclines toward Sabellianism or modalism. He, therefore, conceives God as a single Person or Subject with different modes of outward

¹⁰⁰ See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/1, 2nd ed., ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley et al. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 450, 470.

¹⁰¹ Pinncock, *Flame of Love*, 34.

¹⁰² Hill offers a valuable discussion of this way of construing the Trinity in his *Three-Personed God*, chap. 5: “Neo-modal Trinitarianism: The Uni-personal God of Three Eternal Modes of Being.”

¹⁰³ See Robert W. Jenson, “You Wonder Where the Spirit Went,” *Pro Ecclesia* 2 (1993): 296-304.

¹⁰⁴ Hendrikus Berkhof, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1982), 116.

expression and not as a Tri-unity of persons. Equally, in accordance with Geoffrey Lampe, the Spirit is neither an “impersonal influence nor a divine entity or hypostasis which is a third person of the Godhead, but God himself, his personal presence, as active and related.”¹⁰⁵ For Lampe, then, the Holy Spirit simply refers to God himself and not to a distinct person, the third person of the Trinity. These perspectives that have been considered here undermine the missions of the second and third persons in the economic Trinity since they tend to deny any authentic inner distinctions in the immanent Trinity which grounds the missions in the economic Trinity.

There is no doubt that if distinctiveness can be ascribed to the Father and the Son, it is also ascribable to the Spirit. If the three members of the Trinity are described as persons, are they equally persons in the same way? Yet, because of the familiar family imageries associated with the terms, Father and Son, it is easier to have at least, a tangible sense of the designations in terms of persons. The Spirit, however, presents a unique challenge because of the absence of a similar familiar family imagery to designate her personhood.¹⁰⁶ So in what way can the Spirit be said to be a person? The objection to use the term person to designate the trinitarian hypostases, and especially in the identification of the third hypostasis is made much more formidable by Western understanding of person, beginning from Descartes, as a stable, autonomous, and independent center of consciousness. Going by this construal of person, the trinitarian persons may amount to tritheism, as three gods and three centers of consciousness. It is in view of such modern sensibility that Barth prefers the alternative term “mode of being” to person whereas

¹⁰⁵ Geoffrey W. H. Lampe, *God as Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 208.

¹⁰⁶ Pinncock, *Flame of Love*, 14.

Rahner speaks of “Subsisting Relations,” “three relatively distinct ways of existing,” or “ways of being.”¹⁰⁷ It is true as Rahner grants that the category of person is not a biblical concept but a theological construct which is one of his reasons for pushing for setting it aside. Rahner hopes that consciously dropping the concept of person would not jeopardize our understanding of the Trinity as it is revealed.¹⁰⁸ Rahner’s concepts act as functional analogies rather than personal ones for delineating the complexity of God’s being.¹⁰⁹ The fact, however, remains that Rahner’s alternative terms still suggest some form of neomodalism as Hill contends.¹¹⁰ If Rahner accepts the term “Trinity” in order to articulate its mode of existing, is it not also the case that the term is non-biblical and a theological construct? To be sure, Rahner knows that the term Trinity, although not a biblical concept, justifiably preserves the truth of Scripture (that the Godhead comprises the Father, the Son, and the Spirit; three but one and only true God) than a mere preoccupation with words of Scripture. So how then can we continue to speak of three persons but one God?

Apart from the sensibility towards the modern construal of person, which is a genuine concern, is it sufficient to dismiss the term “person” on grounds of its non-biblical status but only a theological construct? I suggest that it would still be helpful to retain the term “Person” notwithstanding its non-biblical foundation to preserve the biblical truth that the members of the Trinity co-exist in mutual relationship of reciprocal

¹⁰⁷ Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 74.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 22, 101, 104.

¹⁰⁹ Alasdair I. C. Heron, *The Holy Spirit* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983), 174.

¹¹⁰ Hill, *The Three-Personed God*, 145.

self-giving and receiving love and are more than mere “manifestation of God in three roles”¹¹¹ as any functional analogies tend to suggest. God is not merely a single undifferentiated unity but a triadic complex communion of persons in love.¹¹² It is not within the scope of this work to trace the long development of the term “Person” as much of that has already been done by other scholars.¹¹³ Suffice it to say that in this corpus, the term “person” should be understood as a distinct identity who enters into relationships with otherness and does not exist without or apart from the others. So understood then, the term Person makes sense only in terms of relationships/relationality. As a distinct identity, a person is uniquely centered but not necessarily self-enclosed or self-centered. Persons, as Paul Fiddes nicely points out, “are ‘ecstatic,’ that is self-transcending in communication with others, especially in the movement of love. ...the person lives from openness beyond itself to others; it is a centre in the sense of being a centre of communication. What is primary is not self-reflection [in the sense of the Cartesian cogito], but action in relationships.”¹¹⁴ To be person, therefore, transcends simply being an individual but one who is not apart from otherness. It is in this sense that we would understand person as used with regard to the Trinity. It is thus, in this light that we speak of the Spirit as a distinct Person, indeed as the third Person of the Trinity. Ultimately, Fiddes’ caveat is to be heeded, that “personal language for God remains an analogy, but it

¹¹¹ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 37.

¹¹² Pinncock, *Flame of Love*, 35.

¹¹³ The Orthodox scholar and theologian, Zizioulas has given a valuable discussion on the development of the term, person, in both its Greek and Latin, as well as contemporary metamorphosis. See *Being as Communion*, 27-65.

¹¹⁴ Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 22.

has the capacity to be a language of participation, pointing to engagement in God and drawing us into such involvement.”¹¹⁵ The language of person and relationality in God resonates with what we do in worship, for instance, and so is significant for “the corporate life of a community.”¹¹⁶

1.5.2 Biblical Testimony to the Personhood of the Spirit

As noted earlier, there has been a tendency in Western theology to deny personhood to the Spirit and view her simply as the power of Christ. It is not right, as Gregory of Nazianzus rightly warned, to “give Essence to the Father and deny Personality to the Others, and make Them only Powers of God.”¹¹⁷ In the biblical stories of the New Testament, we can easily recognize the three Characters, Father, Son, and Spirit, interact and relate among themselves, at least in the *oikonomia* which is about the mission of the Son and the Spirit from the Father in the world.¹¹⁸ At a minimal level, the concept of person suggests a “being who can say ‘I’ with self-reflexivity or... with awareness.”¹¹⁹ Instances abound in the Bible in which God is presented as speaking in the first-person singular pronoun. A typical example, among several others, is found in Exodus 3:14 where God says “I AM.” Again, at the baptism of Jesus in which the trinitarian persons are seen to be interacting, the Father says “You are *my* Son, this day *I*

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 33.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Gregory Nazianzen, *Fifth Theological Oration*, § 32.

¹¹⁸ Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., *After the Spirit: A Constructive Pneumatology from Resources Outside the Modern West* (Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2005), 22.

¹¹⁹ Graham A. Cole, *He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2007), 66.

have begotten you” [(Lk 3:23), emphasis mine]. The case of Jesus is not difficult to discern since he became human with a human face and spoke human language. But among several instances of where Jesus uses the first-person pronoun, one that has a tinge of emphasis to it has to do with his response, at his trial, to the crowds’ chorused interrogation, “‘So you are the Son of God?’ And Jesus said to them, ‘You are right, I am’” (Lk 22:70). In the case of the Holy Spirit, there is clearly a paucity of instances where the Spirit speaks in the first-person. However, one obvious evidence is found in Acts 13:2 where the Holy Spirit speaks in the first-person when giving direction to the church at Antioch to commission Barnabas and Paul for mission work, “Set apart *for me* Barnabas and Paul for the work to which *I* have called them (emphasis mine).” This first-person perspective with regard to the Holy Spirit is, as Cole concurs, “a sufficient condition for personhood;” while admitting at the same time its slenderness as a basis on which to establish a robust doctrine of the personhood of the Spirit.¹²⁰

In any case, the New Testament is replete with evidences that indicate the construal of the Holy Spirit as a Person. John’s Gospel, more often than not, speaks of the hypostatic Holy Spirit that Jesus would send to his disciples in the wake of his departure to return to the Father. Thus, in what is described as his Last Discourse, Jesus promises to send “another Comforter” (*paraklētos*); also “Helper” or “Advocate” or “Counselor.” By saying “another Comforter,” Jesus appears to imply that the Comforter would be “another of the same kind as Jesus”¹²¹ himself; someone “who is equi-hypostatic in relation to the

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid., 67.

hypostatic Logos.”¹²² Just as mentioned above, apart from the one clear instance where the Holy Spirit speaks in the first-person, other references that speak of the Spirit as a person, particularly, the Johannine Last Discourse, use the third-person personal pronoun.

The following instances, therefore, suggest that the Holy Spirit can be spoken of as a person: “I will ask the Father and he will send you another Comforter to be with you forever, that Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees *him* nor knows *him*. But you know *him*, for *he* is with you and will be in you” (Jn 14:16-17); “But the Comforter, the Holy Spirit...*he* will teach you all things” (v. 26); “When the Comforter comes...the Spirit of truth, *he* will testify about me” (15:26); “I will send *him* to you and when *he* comes, *he* will convict the world” (16: 7-8); “when *he*, the Spirit of truth comes, *he* will guide you into all truth. *He* will not speak on *his* own; *he* will speak only what *he* hears, and *he* will tell you what is yet to come. *He* will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you” [(vv. 13-14), all emphasis mine]. Sergius Bulgakov contends that all these references can be understood only if we view them “as spoken with reference to a person [not mere personification] and, moreover, to a person who is perfectly similar to the person of the other Comforter, Christ.”¹²³ We should make no mistake about this. Bulgakov is not suggesting that Christ and the Spirit are identical without any distinction. Of course, for Jesus’ promise of “another” implies a second after the first, and hence, a distinction in identity. It is on the basis of this promise of another Comforter with a personal coefficient that Bulgakov argues that the event of

¹²² Sergius Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, U. K.: Eerdmans, 2004), 268-69.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 269.

the Pentecost could be nothing other “the descent of the third hypostasis Himself into the world; not of spirit but of the Spirit, not of the gifts only, but of their Source, the Paraclete.”¹²⁴ An understanding of the personhood of the Spirit as articulated above is helpful in avoiding the reduction of the Spirit to just God acting or simply “an impersonal force from God.”¹²⁵ As Gregory of Nazianzus points out about speaking of the Spirit as God’s action or act, “act language reduces the Spirit to an accident of God.”¹²⁶

Other New Testament testimonies that allude to the personal character of the Holy Spirit include, *inter alia*, the following: in the epistle to the Romans, Paul writes of the witness of “the Spirit [who] assures our spirit that we are God’s children” (8:16); “the Spirit helps us in our weakness. ...the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he (God) who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will” (vv. 26-27). It is only a person in the true sense of the word that can pray or intercede for another; that can be said to have a mind, and that can intercede according God’s will. A sheer impersonal force cannot perform any of such personal acts. The “mind” of the Spirit (*to phronēma tou pneumatos*) can only be spoken of a person rather than of a blind force or power. The Spirit must then be a person in order to perform such actions. Again, in 1 Corinthians 2:10, “The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.” Furthermore, the text, “All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines” (1 Cor 12:11) also confirms the personal

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Cole, *He Who Gives Life*, 67.

¹²⁶ Gregory Nazianzen, *Fifth Theological Oration*, § 6.

character of the Spirit. Again, if God is personal, it is legitimate to say that by the same token, the Spirit of God belongs in some sense to the same nature as God's from whom she proceeds. As proceeding from the Father (as in an "act" of the Father) who is the origin of divinity, since "act" follows "the manner of being," then the Spirit who proceeds from the Father belongs to the nature of God who is Person. As Paul says: "only the Spirit of God searches the depths of God" (1 Cor 2: 10-12); for the Spirit to search the depths of God, then she must be a Person in a sense and not merely power or an impersonal force. Moreover, Ephesians 4:30 characterizes the Holy Spirit as a person who can be grieved and so warns: "do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." One can grieve only a person but not a sheer force. The fact that Holy Spirit remains invisible does not necessarily militate against her personality; "that...belongs to the category of Paraclete—Teacher, Director, Protector, [and] Counselor—this invests...[her] with all the essential attributes of that which we understand by personality."¹²⁷

We have so far established that the Holy Spirit is a Person rather than an impersonal force. Yet, the Bible is replete with impersonal metaphors used to describe the Spirit and her activities. For example, the Spirit is spoken of as wind, fire, breath, dove, water, and so on. How do we reconcile such impersonal metaphors with the identity of the Spirit as a person who is also personal? Ralph Del Colle has argued for the "complementarity of impersonal and personal images of the Holy Spirit." He contends that a trajectory that moves from the category of "presence to power to

¹²⁷ Henry B. Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament: A Study of Primitive Christian Teaching* (London: MacMillan, 1910), 293.

personhood”¹²⁸ would generate a more robust trinitarian pneumatology. According to Del Colle, “The Spirit’s presencing is donative and life-giving but self-effacing in regard to the Spirit’s own Person.”¹²⁹ Thanks to her self-effacement, in both economic and immanent Trinity, the Holy Spirit manifests the Persons of the Father and the Son and is constituent of their distinction from each other.¹³⁰ Thus, the Spirit of relationality prevents the Triune Persons from either collapsing into each other or remaining self-enclosed without openness to the other. In this way too, the Spirit creates space in the Trinity into which she ushers humans to participate in Trinitarian love. It is only as person, as Del Colle notes, that the Spirit “can recreate persons in community ecstatically oriented to the other.”¹³¹ The Spirit sustains the ecstasy of the divine life, the loving relationships within the Trinity, as well as its overflow in creation and history. Even though in the traditional Trinitarian taxis, the Spirit appears as a third Person, she nevertheless, remains the contact Person in whom God through Christ reaches out to the world in love, as well as in whom we have access to the Father through Christ.¹³²

1.5.3 The Spirit and Gender

As hinted at earlier, gender identity has for too long been one of the ways by which difference has been used negatively to suppress and dominate the other. There is

¹²⁸ Ralph Del Colle, “The Holy Spirit: Presence, Power, Person,” *Theological Studies* 62 (2001): 322-40.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 333.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 333-34.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 334.

¹³² Kilian McDonnell, “A Trinitarian Theology of the Holy Spirit?” *Theological Studies* 46 (1985): 191-227; *The Other Hand of God: The Holy Spirit as the Universal Touch and Goal* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2001).

no question that gender discourse is a very sensitive issue in almost every area of contemporary studies, more so, in theological scholarship.¹³³ Masculinity has often been conceived as superior to femininity which, by the same token, has been consistently deemed inferior, and hence, the frequent mistreatment and marginalization of women by men. Such construal has had several implications for women who have been suppressed variedly: economically, politically, socially, culturally, religiously, and so on. Gender issue calls for cultivation of sensitivity and attention to the language of gender about God, and more particularly, about the Holy Spirit. The revolution in gender scholarship has, among other things, engendered the use of inclusive language currently in speaking to issues of general concern as well as a reconsideration of patriarchy.

Some feminist theologians have vehemently interpellated the dominant and exclusive use of male metaphors for the Triune God. According to such view, the exclusive use of male metaphors for God does not offer women a horizon within God; it makes women find no place of belonging in God.¹³⁴ In order, therefore, to provide a horizon for women in God, and to make for what some regard as equality of genders,

¹³³ There is clearly a barrage of monographs and other works on gender issues in contemporary scholarship especially in theology. Some of them include but not limited to the following: Susan A. Basow, *Sex-Role Stereotypes: Traditions and Alternatives* (Monterey, California: Brooks/Cole, 1980); Rebecca S. Chopp, *The Power to Speak: Feminism, Language, and God* (New York: Crossroad, 1989); Virginia Ramney Mollenkott, *The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God as Feminine* (New York: Crossroad, 1983); Sandra M. Schneiders, *Women and the Word: The Gender of God in the New Testament and in the Spirituality of Women* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986); Elisabeth Fiorenza Schüssler, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Reconstruction of Early Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983); Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Feminine Imagery for the Divine: The Holy Spirit, the Odes of Solomon, and Early Syriac Tradition," *St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly* 37 (1993):111-39; and Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, esp. chap. 4: "Gender Identity."

¹³⁴ Luce Irigaray, *Divine Women*, trans. Stephen Meucke (Sydney: Local Consumption Publications, 1986).

some other feminist theologians have advocated for making one of the Persons of the Trinity, precisely the Holy Spirit, feminine; or more radically, to use exclusively female metaphors for all the trinitarian Persons.¹³⁵ A possible strong reason for all this push about gender language in God is that an equilibration of God's gender would go a long way in accounting for the equal dignity of men and women. Without trivializing this argument for the equal dignity of men and women since patriarchy has been dominant for too long, the fact remains that God is neither male nor female. God is essentially genderless or transgender.

Again, even the question of making one of the Triune Persons feminine in order to foster the equality of men and women is still not sufficiently balanced since the other two members remain males. Moreover, pushing for wholesale female metaphors for the Triune Persons ends up excluding men entirely. In that sense, it reinscribes what it is trying to overcome. The point is that we must cultivate sensitivity to the fact that God is beyond all gender distinctions. At best, the language of gender distinctions in God is due to the limitation of human language which speaks about persons in terms of sexual distinctions as either male or female. Indeed, the current revolution in sexual orientations problematizes language of sexual distinctions in God: is God male or female, homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual, transsexual, and so on? Since God is beyond all gender, "gendered language about God should not be used to legitimize a particular construction of gender identity"¹³⁶ such as masculinity is superior because God is male whereas femininity is inferior because God is not feminine. "All employment of God

¹³⁵ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is*, 42-57.

¹³⁶ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 171.

language for construction of gender identity is illegitimate and ought to be resisted.

...Whether we use masculine or feminine metaphors for God, God models our common humanity, not our gender specificity.”¹³⁷ God mirrors qualities characteristic of both fatherhood and motherhood. Volf maintains that whereas gender identity is rooted in our sexed bodies, its content is culturally and socially constructed, interpreted, negotiated, and re-negotiated over time and space.¹³⁸

Going by the traditional metaphors used for the trinitarian persons, while the Father and the Son are specifically male metaphors, the Spirit is not gender-specific. In Hebrew, the term Spirit (*rûah*) is said to be usually but not always grammatically feminine. The Spirit, rendered as (*pneuma*) in Greek is grammatically neuter. But in Latin, the word Spirit (*spiritus*) is grammatically masculine, whereas in Syriac, Spirit is also feminine. In the Johannine Gospel, the Spirit (*paraklētos*) is masculine, hence, John’s use of the pronouns “he,” “his,” and “him,” when speaking of the Holy Spirit. From the foregoing, it is obvious that the question of the metaphorical gender of the Spirit is far from settled but remains an open one. Thus, one can use any of the pronouns—*he*, *she*, or *it*—for the Holy Spirit.¹³⁹ But since we have already established beyond reasonable doubt that the Holy Spirit possesses personhood, using the pronoun “it” detracts from that personhood, thingifies or reifies it, and thus renders the Spirit as an impersonal force or power. Furthermore, since the Spirit can be viewed as both feminine and masculine, using exclusively feminine metaphor for the Spirit would tend to ossify

¹³⁷ Ibid., 171-72.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 174-175.

¹³⁹ Pinncock, *Flame of Love*, 15.

gender distinctions in God and gloss over or even deny the feminine dimensions of Father and Son. While it remains imperative for us to be sensitive to gender issues especially as gender differences have for a long time been used to totalize and suppress others, it is, nevertheless, far from being clear that the ascription of feminine metaphor to the Spirit solves rather than creates more problems. The fact that it is obvious that different Christian traditions use different genders for the Spirit, implies that God transcends gender. This is a fact to which we must be sensitive. Since God is genderless, any gender language about God must be very sensitive to this fact and must not use gender differences to legitimate such oppressive binaristic hierarchies as superior/inferior, strong/weak, diligent/lazy, and so on. Since the Spirit can be spoken of using different gender metaphors depending on the context and tradition, this work will be faithful to the gender pronoun for the Spirit when making reference to any of the said traditions. But overall, we shall just use the term “Spirit” and particularly when referring to the work of the Spirit as the one who births life, we shall use the female pronoun. All in all, “The Spirit of God gives rise to a multiplace force field that is sensitive to differences. In this force field, enjoyment of creaturely, invigorating differences can be cultivated while unjust, debilitating differences can be removed in love, mercy, and gentleness.”¹⁴⁰ The “unity of the Spirit” is not destructive of differences but rather effectively cultivates and sustains such differences in the differentiated community that is the body of Christ.¹⁴¹ This action of the Spirit with regard to differences inspires sensitivity to difference and challenges all manner of “uncontrolled generalizations made from a specific, typical

¹⁴⁰ Welker, *God the Spirit*, 22.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

perspective.”¹⁴² The unity of the Spirit is not, therefore, a simplistic monohierarchical uniformity but rather entails an enriching, life-giving, “life-enhancing, invigorating pluralism of the Spirit.”¹⁴³ Admittedly, within the equality-in-difference cultivated by the Spirit, equality does not obliterate differences; “men do not become women and women do not become men,”¹⁴⁴ Greeks are not Jews and Jews are not Greeks. Yet each enriches and benefits from the other in a relationality that yields openness to identity construction.

1.6 Terminological Clarifications

1.6.1 Alterity/Other and Same/Self

Etymologically, the term alterity is derived from the Latin *alter – tēra – tērum* which has a number of semantic possibilities. It could mean “one of two;” as a numeral, it means “second;” of similarity, it means “another” or “a second,” and, of difference, it means “other.” The term is further related to the Latin *alteritat; alteritas* which means “the state of being ‘other’ or ‘different.’”¹⁴⁵ Other synonyms of the term include: alter ego, alternation, and so forth. Thus, the term alterity points to the particularity, distinctiveness, and irreducibility of the “other.” It is a matter of saying that the other as one of two, as the second in the set cannot simply be reduced or collapsed into the one or the self. The identity of the other cannot be annihilated.

Western philosophical tradition especially under the aspects of modernity

¹⁴² Ibid., 25.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 27.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 26.

¹⁴⁵ For further discussion of the term, see G. A. Johnson and M. B. Smith, eds., *Ontology and Alterity Merleau-Ponty* (Everston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1990).

constructed “an ontology of ‘sameness.’” Such ontology was embedded on the immanence of consciousness as the matrix for knowledge and signification. Since the time of Descartes, Kant, Husserl and others, the essences of objective reality (*noemata*) in the world have to give themselves to consciousness and its acts (*noesis*) in order to constitute knowledge and meaning making. In this way not only were phenomena but also human beings were reduced to concepts in order to be objects of knowledge. In Husserlian phenomenological tradition of eidetic or egological reduction, for instance, what is knowable and known, is that which in intentionality becomes one with consciousness as the object intended.¹⁴⁶ To speak of knowledge of the other then, all that the subject or the self has to do is simply to solipsistically return to self devoid of any relation to the exteriority and objectivity of the other as other. In this solipsistic noetic movement, the other is only realized by the self as an objectified and thematized “included self” and who thus brings the other into presence via intentional consciousness. The other becomes merely a duplicate of the self and is not related to as a subject. This amounts to ontological violence and epistemic imperialism.

Until Levinas, in Western philosophy, the other has always been suppressed and reduced to the regime of sameness. Sameness in this sense is that which assimilates both actually and potentially everything which lies outside it.¹⁴⁷ The same, going by this construal totalizes the other par excellence; it incorporates alterity within the hegemony

¹⁴⁶ See Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973); *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1970).

¹⁴⁷ Davis, *Levinas*, 40.

and empire of sameness.¹⁴⁸ Against this backdrop, Levinas' intellectual breakthroughs aimed at not only a break with this imperial ontology in order to preserve the irreducibility of alterity but equally at the preservation of the relationship between the same and the other without the dissolution of either.¹⁴⁹ Whether or not Levinas succeeded in such an attempt is a matter of debate. Nevertheless, it is to his credit to have pointed out this subterranean but insidious current prevailing in Western production of knowledge.

In current philosophy especially since Levinas, the term alterity has shifted the focus on the other from being conceived merely as an epistemic other—the other whose significance merely lies in the extent to which s/he can be known as the object of consciousness—to the particular, objective, and concrete other “who is actually located in a political, cultural, linguistic or religious context.”¹⁵⁰ Since genuine encounter is possible only where an other is recognized as such, it is such a recognition that can engender the possibility of “a transference across and between differences of culture, gender, class, [religion], and other social categories.”¹⁵¹ The other is to be recognized as an other and not merely tolerated. For operative under toleration is the assumption that the self is still superior to the other who happens to be different from the self; thus the self merely

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, see esp. sec. 1: “The Same and the Other.”

¹⁵⁰ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds. *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 11.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 12.

tolerates the other without actually acknowledging the difference of the other.¹⁵² In this work, therefore, the “other” is to be understood as one who is always located and sedimented within a particular context and may not be subsumed under some form of universal and universalizing category.

1.6.2 Identity and Difference

As seen from the foregoing, especially in modernity, conceptions of ontology and epistemology seem to gravitate around a stable self who interpellates reality by subjecting it to the categories of the mind in order to arrive at the truth of knowledge. This essential self perseveres in being in the manner of Spinoza’s *essendi*. But identity is not about essentialism or nativism. Identity is about the self, while maintaining an “I” becomes an “I” that is able to be open to an other in an encounter. Without being destroyed, the “I” in the encounter with the other in a milieu of “giving and receiving” is rather transformed and enriched as well as the other. In order to shed some light with regard to how identity is to be understood in this work, a cursory look at one way of understanding identity according Homi Bhabha would be helpful. In his innovative work, *The Location of Culture*,¹⁵³ Bhabha specifies three conditions that underlie the process of identification from the perspective of postcolonial discourse.

The first is that “to exist is to be called into being in relation to an otherness, its look or locus.”¹⁵⁴ Bhabha here brings out the importance of locatedness and context in

¹⁵² Rey Chow, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 198-99.

¹⁵³ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

the forging of identity. Genuine identity can only be forged in relation to an other who is different in a space that holds the possibility of the inversion of roles like those between a host and a guest. Identity is, therefore, not about perseverance in being, insistence on *essendi* or stable essence, but an openness to the giving of self to the other as well as receiving the other into the self. The self necessarily has to step out of its consolidating essence in openness to the other “and undertake a re-adjustment of its identity in light of the other’s alterity.”¹⁵⁵ In this process, identity construction is “constantly in *statu nascendi* rather than *essendi*, brought over again into being.”¹⁵⁶ Such a process often creates differing identities not only by repetitive encounters with the other but also when there is a change in the complex social structuration of relationships in the space that the self and the other inhabit.

In the second condition, Bhabha notes that “the very place of identification... is a space of splitting.”¹⁵⁷ The insight of Bhabha here is suggestive of the ambivalence of identity construction especially under such oppressive and repressive condition as colonialism. The colonized and totalized other asserts his irreducibility to the same by subverting the self’s artifice inscribed on the body of the other.¹⁵⁸ The other mimics the same without actually becoming the same. Depending on the situation, there is a certain masking or personage that goes with the process of identification which in turn points to the agency of the other. Thus, identity is always negotiated and renegotiated in the

¹⁵⁵ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 110.

¹⁵⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1992), 198.

¹⁵⁷ Bhabha, *Location*, 63.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 64.

interstitial space of encounter. The other is one who cannot simply be completely totalized; the other possesses a surplus of meaning and possibilities that can never be completely known or simply be incorporated into sameness. There is no such thing as absolute knowledge of the other as totality claims.

Finally, the third is that “the question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, never a *self*-fulfilling prophecy – it is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image. The demand of identification, that is, to be for an Other – entails the representation of the subject in the differentiating order of otherness.”¹⁵⁹ This reinforces the point that identity production is not merely a return to a native pre-originary essence but always a transformation of the subject in the encounter with the other at distinct levels of differential relationships in the space of the “in-between.” More than perseverance in being, identity production is about ways of existing, about how relationships are forged through constant negotiation, splitting, repetition, and re-adjustment in the third space or interstice.

The phenomenon of difference is indicative of the fact that all reality is differentiated. There seems to be a subtle distinction between diversity and difference. Whereas, according to Letty Russell, “Diversity is about variety in general. ...difference refers to concrete elements in our lives that distinguish, contrast, or separate one group or person from another.”¹⁶⁰ As Al Condeluci has pointed out, “Difference can come in all

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Letty M. Russell, *Just Hospitality: God’s Welcome in a World of Difference*, eds. J. Shannon Clarkson and Kate M. Ott (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 20.

shapes and form. Some people are different in appearance, or skin color, or culture [or race, or religion, or gender, or class]. Others are different in the way they think, or act, or relate. Still others are different because they are poor, inept, or unhealthy; tall, short or squat.”¹⁶¹ Understood in this sense, difference is a given. Indeed, “Differences themselves are a God-given gift.”¹⁶² In itself, difference alone is not necessarily cause for negative experience, hostility, or rejection. As a matter of fact, the reality of the mosaic of differences makes interrelationships and relationality possible. For it is from within the riches of one’s difference that one is able to step out into the space of the “in-between” to enrich the other and be enriched by the other. Difference can be used either as a tool for, or a weapon against fostering communication and understanding one another. Put another way, difference can be used either for good or for ill. It is used as a weapon when, “the notion of difference is...experienced from its shadow side.”¹⁶³ That is, when it is used as a rationale to oppress, downgrade, exclude, and denigrate the other. This is usually the case when a particular understanding of difference is viewed as the norm and serves as the standard for otherizing and measuring other particular differences. In that case, difference becomes “constructed as a tool for oppression and manipulation.”¹⁶⁴ It is little wonder Canadian Jesuit theologian, Lonergan, rebukes “those people and cultures who read themselves as normative, while they assume that ‘the rest of the world is made up of strangers and the strangers are totally strange, totally

¹⁶¹ Al Condeluci, *Beyond Difference* (Delray Beach, Florida: St. Lucie Press, 1996), 5.

¹⁶² Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 35.

¹⁶³ Condeluci, *Beyond Difference*, 5.

¹⁶⁴ Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 35.

odd...inscrutably Oriental' [or African]."¹⁶⁵ This normativity is used to essentialize, otherize, inferiorize, distantiate, and exclude those other particular differences—peoples, cultures, religions, gender, and others—that are found, or thought to be outside of the norm. To put it differently, those that fail to fit into the normative matrix are construed as abnormal. Such construal of abnormality usually becomes a justification to subjugate the other who because of the question of being different from the self or the same is viewed as evil.

Absurdly enough, there is often an assumption that persons who are different are bad, evil, savage, lazy, and inept because it is their responsibility and fault to have allowed the difference to occur. Since such persons who are different fall outside the canon of the constructed parameter or norm, they are often treated in negative, hostile, and shunning ways. The “other” is simply despised as an object of scorn, excluded and, regarded as an inferior person. As A. Kohn has put it, “Rivalry and cruelty thrive on distance because distance allows us to turn people [the other] into abstractions.”¹⁶⁶ When difference is essentialized, people are treated and marked out as having no common nature with those who set the yardstick for normality.

Another strong reason for alienating the other who is different is fear which may be embedded in ignorance of the other. As Russell rightly points out, “The problem that

¹⁶⁵ Bernard J. F. Lonergan, “Time and Meaning,” in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Robert C. Croken, Frederick E. Crowe, and Robert M. Doran, *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1958-1964*, vol. 6 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 95, cited in Michele Saracino, “Subject for the Other: Lonergan and Levinas on Being Human in Postmodernity,” in *In Deference to the Other: Lonergan and Contemporary Continental Thought*, eds. Jim Kanaris and Mark J. Doorley (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), 71.

¹⁶⁶ Cited in *Ibid.*, lii, with no reference provided.

we face is not that we are different, but that we often fear that difference and reject those outside our church, our community, our nation, [our race, our class, and so on].”¹⁶⁷ There could also be another subterranean reason for the fear and the consequent avoidance of the other. Simply avoiding or alienating the other is always the easier alternative than to deal with such feeling more appropriately by unmasking the undergirding rationale for such trepidation. Lonergan, who is good at deciphering the root of our various sensations, such as love, fear, jealousy, anger, attraction, and so on, when encountering another, has offered us a reasonable approach. Accordingly, a better approach is to interrogate at a more conscious level the subject’s experience in the encounter with the other in order to ascertain if the other actually poses any danger or whether the simple reason for the fear is bias.¹⁶⁸ Bias is a flight, and indeed, an aberration of understanding. Where bias is allowed to scuttle understanding, the demands of concrete situations on intelligence and morality in practical living become distorted. “Bias creeps into one’s outlook, rationalization into one’s morals, ideology into one’s thought.”¹⁶⁹ Consequently, a corruption of values occurs, “So one may come to hate the truly good, and love the really evil. Nor is that calamity limited to individuals. It can happen to groups, to nations, to blocks of nations, to mankind. It can take different, opposed, belligerent forms to divide mankind and to menace civilization with destruction.”¹⁷⁰ Lonergan’s contention is that bias prevents the subject from gaining self-understanding through the insights that may

¹⁶⁷ Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 21.

¹⁶⁸ Cited in Saracino, “Subject for the Other” in *In Deference to the Other*, 68.

¹⁶⁹ Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 40.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

arise in the encounter with another. Indeed, bias leads the self to censor and suffocate any new insights emanating from the encounter that appear to pose a threat to the self's identity, certitudes, and securities. In Lonergan's terminology, this type of disposition is called scotosis which leaves the self with a blind spot—scotoma—which s/he can come to see only through the eyes of the Other.¹⁷¹ Bias thus fosters misunderstanding both in the subject and in the other leading to alienation. Because of this bias which stems from fear and leads to misunderstanding, differences which are ordinarily good come to be essentialized and reconstituted in a negative manner. Such fear could also be the fear of losing one's privilege of being the dominating group or person.

Lonergan further contends that bias deprives oneself of the possibility of realizing oneself in self-transcendence. One only "achieves authenticity in self-transcendence. One can live in a world, have a horizon, just in the measure that one is not locked up in oneself."¹⁷² Authentic self-transcendence is manifested in not simply living for oneself and satisfying one's own personal desires, but in actually bringing about the good of others. It is only in relationality, in the encounter with the other that one's self-understanding and horizon can be tested. This is because encounter entails "the meeting of persons, appreciating the values they represent, criticizing their defects, and allowing one's living to be challenged at its roots by their words and by their deeds."¹⁷³ Thus, if bias is the reason for the subject's feeling of fear toward the other, then one really needs

¹⁷¹ See Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 191-2, 222-25.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 104.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 247.

to appreciate how that bias hinders appropriate engagement with the other in ways that are life-affirming. If the bias is not properly addressed, the dialectic between the self and the other easily degenerates into interpersonal estrangement and/or violence.¹⁷⁴

Conversion is therefore, realized through authentic self-transcendence. It is a long process that allows for the overcoming of bias, be it individual or group bias. Lonergan challenges the subject—individual and social—to conversion on three levels: intellectual, moral, and religious. The goal of this conversion is to overcome bias which prevents the subject from understanding the other, which understanding leads to a shift in horizon regarding the other, and resulting in authentic living for others and bringing about their good and well-being. Overcoming bias, therefore, repositions the subject from engaging the other in dialectical conflict and normality to solidarity of others in friendship and love.¹⁷⁵

As noted above, differences are for interrelationships and interdependence. It is in this sense that Volf describes “differentiation” as the “creative activity of ‘separating-and-binding’ that results in patterns of interdependence.”¹⁷⁶ The idea of separating-and-binding is very insightful. It points to the ambiguity and complexity involved in identity production. While the aspect of ‘separating’ highlights the distinctiveness of the self and the other, the aspect of ‘binding’ underscores the interrelationship between them. Separateness entails that the other must be recognized in his/her otherness without being assimilated into sameness or be subjugated to the self. Separateness also means that

¹⁷⁴ Saracino, “Subject for the Other,” in *In Deference to the Other*, 68-69.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 70-71.

¹⁷⁶ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 65.

particularities, boundaries, and distinctness “are part of the creative process of differentiation”¹⁷⁷ and identity production. Volf is right when he contends that “without boundaries there would be no discrete identities, and without discrete identities there could be no relation to the other.”¹⁷⁸ Thus, identity includes at the same time, difference/particularity/distance and connection/relatedness/intimacy, and, indeed, heterogeneity. As Volf aptly puts it, “we are who we are not because we are separate from the others who are next to us, but because we are *both* separate *and* connected, *both* distinct *and* related; the boundaries that mark our identities are both barriers and bridges (emphasis original).”¹⁷⁹ Identity, therefore, arises out of the complexity of differentiation in which both the self and the other step out of their enclosed boundaries into the space of the in-between to negotiate their identities via relationality. The “selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other.”¹⁸⁰

Nevertheless, in spite of the definitive intimacy and proximity involved in the process of identity production, the otherness with which the relationship is imbued calls for respect and responsibility of care rather than domination and control. It is this challenge to recognize the otherness of the other that currently drives the thrust of the “politics of difference” which is a campaign against the continuous assimilation of the distinctiveness that marks the other into a dominant or majority identity either overtly or

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 66.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 67.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 3.

covertly.¹⁸¹ It is in this sense of stepping out of the enclosed totalizing self in openness to the other; in the recognition of the unique identity of the other, and in the mutual interaction of self-giving and receiving that identity is to be understood in this work.

1.6.3 Relationality as an “Other Paradigm”

Relationality is the overarching conceptual framework through which the fabrics of the different aspects of this oeuvre are woven together. Let me be clear from the outset that relationality should not be understood as the polar opposite of the dualistic framework that has already been debunked. The paradigm of relationality we have in mind here is not so much an entirely new construction as the recovery and foregrounding of a relegated and subalternized value. The turn to the paradigm of relationality is rather important because it allows us to understand reality from an “other or different perspective” as not necessarily structured according to rigidified hierarchies where one end of the polarity stands as superior to the other conceived as inferior. The framework of relationality that I envision here is one whose operational logic is conjunctive (that is, both/and) rather than disjunctive (that is, either/or) which is the logic of empire; either you homogenize or get excluded. According to the disjunctive logic, for instance, “Whiteness” would be normative and thus superior while “Blackness” would be outside the norm and, therefore, inferior. The conjunctive logic of relationality, which recognizes that genuine differences should be respected and can live together, helps us to challenge and resist all dehumanizing hierarchies. Relationality recognizes the fact that reality is not merely a simple unity but rather a complexity which implies the idea of difference,

¹⁸¹ Charles Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 38.

plurality, multiplicity, and diversity. Thus reality is characterized by a certain degree of fluidity, dynamism, and flexibility rather than *stasis* which finds expression in rigidified and polarized hierarchies that have no relations to each other. It is on this ground that the paradigm of relationality we envisage creates openness for inclusivity whereby those who have been consistently denigrated, pushed to the margins, silenced, or excluded can be recognized, respected, and included on the grounds of equality-in-difference.

Relationality pulls down barriers while perforating boundaries for interaction and cross-epistemological conversation. That is why I would be hesitant to use such an expression as doing theology from below to represent our vision. The simple reason is that the language of “below” and its correlate “above” reinstitutes the notion of rigidified hierarchies.¹⁸²

It must also be pointed out that relationality is not another normative gaze from which vantage point otherness is viewed. This is because relationality rather valorizes the interconnectedness, interdependence, and complementarity inherent in reality. Through relationality, even dichotomous and seemingly contradictory perspectives instead of being seen simply as binaries are rather considered as paradoxes, ambiguities/promises for creativity out of which the emergence of newness might blossom forth. Two conflicting approaches may not necessarily mean that one is true and the other false. It may well mean (and quite often) that each simply represents a different perspective and vision of producing reality informed by social location, culture, and context. Even where tensions are irresolvable, relationality enables us to consider that the opposing relations

¹⁸² See Letty M. Russell, *Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church* (Louisville, Minnesota: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 26.

could still exist in a healthy tension as long as one side does not assimilate the Other into Sameness, or absolutize one position as universal for all. This has been the core of Western universalism—that ghost of Plato—that has, ever since, haunted the Western imagination. In this approach, conclusions about complex systems of reality are drawn from a particular and local epistemic standpoint and then universalized to be the same for all (global designs, à la Mignolo). This approach consistently reduces relationships in the complex system to conditions in the simpler (particular) system and then reconstructs them from there. A particular system, be it religious, cultural, epistemological, socio-political, and so on, becomes *ideological* and *totalitarian* when it claims that it possesses all the truth, that it enjoys a monopoly of the truth and approach, and thus resists and fights against diversity and difference. Universalism usually turns the truth claims of one single group or culture into the norm for measuring the humanity of others. As this is a caricature of human dignity, it more often than not results in tragic situations as people are ready to kill and destroy others because they believe that they are in possession of the right truth while others who disagree with them are in error. All the religious wars and skirmishes in human history with all the blood letting, be it between Christians and Muslims, Catholics and Protestants or Orthodox, boil down to one specific: the belief that there is one and only one correct truth and that one possesses it oneself¹⁸³ or only one's religious Founder has and embodies it all. No doubt, heavenly truth transcends space and time but human perception and interpretation of that truth is always bounded by space and time, and hence, the light of that truth must be refracted through finite human

¹⁸³ See Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations* (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 64.

understanding.¹⁸⁴ But the approach of relationality that we are foregrounding here recognizes that the complex cannot simply be reduced to the particular. Rather the particular as an aspect of the complex because it is capable of being integrated by the more complex system functions to shed light on and to expand the dimensions of the complex.¹⁸⁵ Truth, as Immanuel Wallerstein succinctly puts it, lies in “explaining [the] ever greater layers of complexity.”¹⁸⁶ And quite frankly, there is no one universal way of looking at and explaining reality. Relationality as understood here is conscious of the particularity of every truth claim and of the social context of all value judgments. This is why, the relationality thus proposed prizes mutual listening and empathetic *Verstehen* (understanding) in an encounter with the other, collaboration, solidarity, and valuing the perspectives and contributions of all groups especially those that have been historically and consistently denigrated and silenced. Relationality necessarily requires inclusivity.

Additionally, relationality should not be understood as *relativism*. For relativism radically emerges only where and when each group claims that its own truth claims are the only valid ones and hence, universal for all while at the same time relativizing and excluding others without allowing room for communication. In such a situation where every claim and even every innovation not based in some sort of tradition assumes unparalled universal validity without any relation to something of a more holistic reality,

¹⁸⁴ See Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ See Jurgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, the Gofford Lectures 1984-1985 (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), 100.

¹⁸⁶ Immanuel Wallerstein, *European Universalism: The Rhetoric of Power* (New York and London: The New Press, 2006), 67.

the result is radical relativism.¹⁸⁷ Relationality rather grants that there may be a universal ideal but that it is always ungiven, not present in its raw factualness. Reality is never unmediated. We have to search for it and interpret it. But even when it impinges itself on us, we still need to interpret it based on the categories available to us in order for meaning and understanding to take place. And since we have to find a way of articulating and describing reality that is not a given, we necessarily have to fall back on utilizing categories that do not exist in a vacuum but form part and parcel of particular linguistic repertoires in order to engender understanding. Consequently, there is no such thing as a presuppositionless and absolutist conception of reality. As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks rightly puts it:

Each language is the product of a specific community and its history, its shared experiences and sensibilities. There is no universal language. There is no way we can speak, or communicate or even think without placing ourselves within the constraints of a particular language whose contours were shaped by hundreds of generations of speakers, storytellers, artists and visionaries who came before us, whose legacy we inherit and of whose story we become a part.¹⁸⁸

Because we cannot but utilize linguistic categories that we already know in order to describe that which is ungiven, we definitely then bring our own perceptions and presuppositions informed by our social contexts and epistemic repositories to our production of reality. Thus, unmediated reality becomes mediated for us through the medium of language which is always particular with its own specific symbols, meaning systems, and context. This is also partly because of the characteristic epistemic potential

¹⁸⁷ See David B. Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 41.

¹⁸⁸ Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference*, 54.

of every language to be able to say something new from the wellspring of the already. That is why relationality requires openness, respect, honesty, and humility as we approach others' perspectives. Solidarity of others is the atmosphere in which a more holistic truth could be attained and in which we can also learn from and be enriched by other perspectives in the spirit of mutual respect. In this way, through the paradigm of relationality, we are able to live together without destroying our differences but which rather become valuable assets for mutual enrichment. Relationality, therefore, creates a space of the "in-between," for "border thinking,"¹⁸⁹ where difference is negotiated, identity reconfigured, and where we are transformed through mutual openness to learning from the other. Relationality thus overcomes the logic of the domination system, the logic of discriminatory hierarchies, and the logic of hegemonic epistemology which translates into the process of homogenization or reduction of otherness to sameness. The litmus test of any order—religious, political, socio-economic, and indeed, any civilization—is whether or not it makes room for otherness and recognizes the dignity of equality-in-difference. It is on this note that the relational pneumatology we propose here would help us to tap into ways that would affirm the beauty and importance of difference of all people and the whole creation while equipping us with valuable tools for navigating the boundaries of difference in the spirit of hospitality and deference. This is all the more important in the light of our globalized and interconnected society which "calls us to join

¹⁸⁹ See Walter Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), part 1, chap. 1; see also for clarification of expression below in this work, Chapter 4, sec. 4.5.

across differences [in recognition of our common humanity and] in our common work of sharing in God's creation."¹⁹⁰ And this is solidarity of others par excellence.

1.7 Conclusion

We have so far investigated the crisis that has bedeviled pneumatology in the Western theological tradition. Among other things, we saw how the neo-Scholastic substance-theistic ontology prepared the way for modernity/coloniality world system. With its concentration on subjectivity, modern thought excised the objectivity of the Triune God, and, therefore, relegated God/Spirit-language to the realm of human subjectivity and construction. With the eclipse of the relational Spirit and the consequent metaphysical negation of the historicity, humanity, and difference of the non-European African other, colonialism and slavery were formally justified. The church to a large extent colluded in such legitimization. The recognition of this crisis invites a recovery of relational pneumatology. Relational pneumatology ensures that the unity of the Spirit is not inimical to difference and plurality. Relational pneumatology guarantees that human subjects, irrespective of their differences on the basis of race, gender, sex, class, ability, culture, religion, and so on, can fit together in one world. They can do so while enriching and complementing each other by learning something new about the self or otherwise via the transformative encounter with the other. Relational pneumatology, therefore, provides an other template for negotiating another discourse on the Trinitarian God and, hence, on difference, and for identity production in a way that enables us to participate in God's love and hospitality toward all people and all of creation in a globalized world.

¹⁹⁰ Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 50.

Chapter 2

Dimensions of Spirit Experience in African *Weltanschauungen*

2.1 Introduction

In the first chapter we investigated the crisis of pneumatology in Western Systematic Theology. The issue that emerged to view was the loss of the relational nature of God and the Spirit especially as articulated in neo-Scholastic substance ontotheology. The consequences of that loss include the deployment of difference for exclusionary, oppressive, and exploitative purposes culminating in slavery and colonialism. In the light of these preliminary considerations, this second chapter aims at examining the Etche¹ cosmo-religious *weltanschauung*. It is one example of West African world-views whose focus on relationality as the core mode of being-in-the-world can be harnessed for

¹ Etche is one of the major ethnic groups which make up the present Rivers State, in the core South-South region of the Niger Delta of Nigeria. Of the present twelve ethnic groups in Rivers state Etche ranks the fourth largest after Ikwerre, Kalabari, and Ogoni. It occupies an area of 1500 km² in the northern part of the State. The population is pegged at about one million inhabitants. It is located between latitude 5° and 6° north of the Equator and between longitude 4° and 5° east of the Greenwich. It is bounded in the East and North by the core Igboland, while the Ikwerres bound it to the West and South. The major language spoken by the Etche people is Echie which also was the original name of the ethnic group until anglicized during the colonial era. Echie shares linguistic affinity and kinship with Igbo, Ikwerre, Kalabari, Izon. Echie is said to have five main dialects, namely, central Echie dialect, Ozuzu dialect, Umuoye/Obite dialect, Owu/Egbu dialect, and Omuma dialect. The other language which is also spoken in Etche is Ochichi which is a central Edoid/Delta language with some relationships with the lower Niger languages. Overall, Echie language is spoken by well over 945,140 people. A very important and valuable source on Etche that I rely on as it pertains to its history, language, culture, religion, anthropology, art, education, and so forth, is the work undertaken by seven Etche scholars: Ikechi Nwogu, Naboth Onyesoh, Samuel Amaele, Obinna Nwodin, Victor E. Nweke, Lawrence Ohale, and Joseph Onyenma. In this study, their work is referenced as Ikechi Nwogu et al., *The History of Etche* (Owerri, Nigeria: Springfield Publishers, 2003). This work not only provides enormous insight into the history of Etche but also ample ethnographic data on other aspects. Another major contribution is Prince E. Amaele, *The Socio-Political History of Etche* (Port Harcourt, Nigeria: Osia International Publishers, 2000).

negotiating the boundaries of difference. Such relationality characterized by dynamism, multiplicity, and flexibility, and which aims at the well-being of human beings and the community is more glaring in no other than the dimensions of spirit experience. The Spirit may have been relegated to the background in much of Western historical/systematic Christian thought. By contrast, The Etche religious universe has been and is still suffused with spirit phenomena, for the dimensions of spirits is the horizon within which life is possible and lived. We shall, therefore, examine the structure of the Etche world-view; the taxonomy of the deities and the problems their relationships pose to the conception of One (Supreme) God. The relational understanding of person and the importance of mediation/spirit-possession will be discussed as well. Finally, we shall evaluate the pitfalls and strengths of the Etche relational religious anthropology for religion and society in our globalized world. Overall, our contention here is that relational pneumatology provides a template for negotiating difference and another discourse on the Trinitarian God.

2.2 Etche-African Cosmo-Religious World-View

A people's world-view consists not only, on the conscious level, in the complex of their belief systems, concepts, institutions, shared history and attitudes, language, and their general outlook on the universe around them. Even more so, it fundamentally consists, on the unconscious level, in the underlying symbolic and philosophical order. It is the symbolic dimension, the order of root-metaphors and root paradigms that determines the superstructure of belief systems, meaning-systems and rituals, social organizations and institutions, laws and ethics, and all other aspects of a people's life. What is of ultimate value which determines and shapes a people's measure of other

values, life itself, and what is worth living for, is disclosed through their symbolic universe expressed in symbols, myths, folktales, narratives, art and music, proverbs, customs, and so on. In the Etche religious ontology, the mould of being is undergirded by relationality; it is the magnetic field around which everything gravitates; it is indeed the cardinal characteristic of reality.² All beings in this religious world-view belong to either the visible or invisible world but with constant interaction between the two realms. While my concentration is on the Etche world, I shall also point to similarities or draw support from other West African groups especially, the Akan (Ghana) and the Yoruba (Nigeria). Let me at this point isolate some key component elements that have generally been identified by scholars as structural to West African religious universe, namely: goodness of creation, dynamism, harmony, holism, and humanism.³ I will summarize them briefly.

Goodness of Creation: The world either as created by God or as originally intended by God through a demiurge, is fundamentally good. Imperfection or evil in the world is not ultimately attributable to God and can only be comprehended within a relational framework thereby granting evil only a moral but never an ontological status.⁴

Dynamism: West African world-views abhor *stasis*. They are characterized by

² See Okechukwu C. Njoku, "Igbo Communal Ethos: A More Holistic Template for Rethinking the Principle of Patient Autonomy in Health Care Ethics and Biomedicine," in *Against All Odds: The Igbo Experience in Postcolonial Nigeria*, ed. Apollon O. Nwauwa and Chima J. Korieh (Glassboro, New Jersey: Goldline & Jacobs Publishing, 2011), 352.

³ See Evans M. Zeusse, "Perseverance and Transmutation in African Traditional Religions," in *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society*, ed. J. Olupona (St. Paul, Minnesota: Paragon House, 1991), 167-84; Emefie Ikenga-Metuh, *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions* (Onitsha, Nigeria: Imico Publishers, 1987).

⁴ Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), in *African Philosophy: An Anthology*, 468-71.

dynamism, flexibility, flux, motion, and relationality. These qualities undergird the relationships among the different beings that populate these world-views as we shall see shortly. Hierarchy or order in this universe is conceived in fundamentally relational terms. Every being is a dynamic entity; each is always a part and parcel of a multiplicity and plurality of relationships, all of them influencing each other with nothing being absolute. Such dynamic interactivity can either strengthen or diminish life; forces could be deployed or instrumentalized for good or for ill.

Harmony: In this universe, all beings are interlinked and constantly interact with one another in a dynamic way. To be, in this world-view, is to be related, and the overriding goal of relationships is to establish harmony. The possibility of the deployment of power for negative and antisocial purposes invites the need for constant checks and balances. This calls for a balance of power relations in the socio-political process and for mediators at the mystical/spiritual level who under the guidance of the right deities function therapeutically for the realization of human destiny and the restoration of wholeness.

Holism: The West African universe is one that abhors dichotomy and departmentalization of the world into the sacred/profane, spiritual/material, etc. Rather, the sacred and the profane, the invisible and the visible which are conceived as distinct, they are not separated but overlap into each other.

Humanism: Without a doubt, the West African world-views focus fundamentally on the well-being of the human person. The actions of the divinities are geared toward the divinization of human beings as well as the humanization of the world by working out

human flourishing, destiny actualization, and so enhance and promote solidarity of others and non-violent negotiation of differences in a way respectful of human dignity.

2.2.1 The Taxonomy of Spirits in the Etche Religious Universe

In order to gain a better appreciation of how relationality operates in the Etche universe, it is necessary to examine its understanding of the structuration or organization of beings that populate its universe. According to Nwogu et al., the Etche religious universe is organized around five component elements. These are: “(1) belief in a Supreme Deity (God), (2) belief in deities, (3) belief in spiritual forces, (4) belief in ancestral spirits, and (5) practice of charms and medicines.”⁵ Let me briefly talk about each of these components.

God: This term is used to refer to the Creator, the Unoriginate Origin of all existents, and who enjoys an overall supremacy in a dynamic relationship with all other beings as their Ultimate Source. Among the Etche, this belief enjoys a diachronic and pre-originary status as rooted in folktalks and narratives. In the Akan traditional religion, John Pobee writes: God (*Onyame*) “the Supreme Being has delegated authority to the *abosom* [deities which derive from *Onyame* as rivers from their source]...and to the *mpanyinfo* (the ancestors)....”⁶

Deities/Divinities: Emefie Ikenga-Metuh observes that the terms deity and divinity “refer to that ‘which has the quality of being divine,’ in a comprehensive sense

⁵ Nwogu et al., *The History of Etche*, esp. chap. 5: “Etche Traditional Religion.” See also Bolaji E. Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Problem of Definition* (London: SCM Press, 1977), 139; Elechi Amadi and W.O. Weneka, “Divinities and their (*sic*) Ikwere Religion and Culture,” in *Studies in Ikwere History and Culture*, ed. Otoni Nduka (Port Harcourt: Kraft Books, 1993), 106.

⁶ John S. Pobee, *Toward an African Theology* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1979), 46.

and also to a particular divine being.”⁷ He equally points out that certain African world-views regard the deities as manifestations, refractions, servants, or intermediaries of God. For the Akan, the deities are viewed, according to Pobee, as *Nyame mba* (children or sons of God which highlights both their derived nature and derived power).⁸ Among the Fon of Dahomey, “*Mawu-Lisa* (God) gave birth to all the deities (*Vodu*) and assigned to each a part of the universe to govern [like *Sakpata*, incharge of earth; *Sogbo*, incharge of atmospheric phenomenon; *Agbe-Naete*, incharge of the sea, and *Age*, incharge of the waters and the wild fields].”⁹ In the Etche world, the deities are generally described as *Umu-Mmuo*. According to Nwogu et al, in the Etche religion, *Umu-Mmuo* are perceived to be “in their domain where they play specialized roles.”¹⁰ It is legitimate to say that the deities collaborate with God in their assigned but competent areas of specialization toward the realization of God’s purpose and the dispensing of divine beneficence for the well-being of humanity and the world. But they also enjoy independence of their own within the logic of a flexible, dynamic, and relational divine hierarchy. They are also sometimes referred to as “nature deities” because they are often associated with natural symbolic objects or phenomena like rock, rivers, sun, thunder, and so on. It, however, amounts to a category mistake to extrapolate from such “association with” to “identification of the deities with” the said natural objects or phenomena. The deities are

⁷ See Metuh, *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions*, 54.

⁸ Pobee, *Toward an African Theology*, 47.

⁹ Metuh, *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions*, 41. Metuh points out that *Mawu-Lisa*, though seen as the Creator God of the Fon of Dahomey, is still believed to be first among the deities (*Vodu*), which, in any case, is a rare exception in the West African religious universe.

¹⁰ Nwogu et al., *The History of Etche*, 87.

powerful beings who can either bring good fortunes by ameliorating human destiny or misfortunes if their laws are contravened. The deities are usually grounded, having their own sacred groves, cults, devotees, and priests. They also have their own personal names.

Spirit-Forces: This term is used to refer to non-human spirits which are not the deities in the sense that “generally they have not acquired a distinct personality and cult like the deities.”¹¹ The Etche call them *arushi*. Among the Ashanti of Ghana, they are designated *asuman* (derived from the deities). The spirit-forces can act irrationally and can be manipulated or instrumentalized by spirit adepts for good or for ill.¹²

Ancestors: This refers to the “living-dead” who have acquired the highest spiritual status. Because their spiritual status brings them into closer proximity with God, they are able to bring blessings and benefits to their kins and the community. Their nearness or closeness to their families and the community is highlighted in such rituals as libation and through *Eshe* music in the Etche world. The pouring of libation is one of the cultural practices of the Etche which is a reminder about the intertwinness of the people with God, *Ala* deity, the spirits, and the ancestors.¹³ *Eshe* is “a high spiritual music loaded with messages for the...[living-dead] whose spirits are believed to be present, when played.”¹⁴ The ancestors are never treated with contempt but always held in reverence. There is an ongoing interaction between the living and the living-dead.

Finally, ***Charms and Medicines***: Both charms and medicines are called by the

¹¹ Metuh, *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions*, 55.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ See O. J. Achonwa, *Kolokoche*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Port Harcourt: Chida Press, 1980), 4.

¹⁴ Nwogu et al., *The History of Etche*, 72.

same name in the Etche world as *Ogwu*. The Akan refer to them as *suman*, the Ewe call them *gbo*, the Baluba term them *bwanga*, and so forth.¹⁵ *Ogwu* is believed to possess mystical powers that could be used for good or for ill. Adepts in the field of African medical practice (*dibia*—medicine man or diviner—in Etche, *babalawo* in Yoruba, *nganga* in Bantu, etc.) who possess the requisite knowledge and ability can tap and use the natural potency of *ogwu* for good or for ill. *Ogwu* is understood as medicine when it is used for therapeutic purposes. As charms, *ogwu* could be used for self-protection (like amulets, talisman) or negatively for harming others especially one's enemies (like poison – *nshi*). Here, we see the convergence of the material and the spiritual/mystical.¹⁶

Through divination, the *dibias* are able to diagnose the spiritual cause of sickness and determine the potency and efficacy of a particular *ogwu* that would ameliorate the situation.¹⁷ These are, therefore, the five component elements that constitute the Etche spiritual universe. In what follows, I draw on Metuh's work to show the certain models of the organization of West African religious world-views.

2.2.2 Models of West African Religious World-Views

Metuh has helpfully articulated four models that one may encounter in African world-views, namely, the pyramidal, ecological, cosmic, and social.¹⁸ A brief summary of these models is in order.

The Pyramidal: Drawing on the insights of Edwin.W. Smith, Metuh relates how

¹⁵ Metuh, *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions*, 55.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Nwogu et al., *The History of Etche*, 94.

¹⁸ See Ibid., chap. 4, esp. 56-63.

some African societies understand the structure of the invisible world in the form of a pyramid or triangle. According to this vision, four categories of spiritual beings are recognized: God, nature deities, ancestors, and magical powers. While God is at the apex, nature deities and ancestors are on the opposite sides of the triangle, and magical powers at the base.¹⁹ Metuh does observe, following Smith, that whereas the Bantu speaking societies of East and Central Africa do not have places for nature spirits in their cosmologies, they are prominent in West African cosmologies which, therefore, recognize five rather than four categories of spiritual beings.²⁰ Suggestively, the pyramidal model tends to give the impression of a top-down command and unilateral hierarchical structure. But we shall show that in the Etche world-view, hierarchy is conceived in a relational and dynamic sense.

The Ecological: In this model, Metuh samples the Asante of Ghana and the Kalabari of Nigeria. The former inhabit an area whose many parts are watered by a network of rivers, lakes, and seas, whereas the latter occupy the creeks of the Niger Delta. Both, therefore, use the ecological model in classifying the spiritual beings in their cosmologies. Particularly, in the Asante myth, *Onyame* (God) is imaged as the source of all beings including the divinities or deities (*Abosom*) who are conceived as the sons and manifestations of God. In a dynamic fashion, the deities flow from *Onyame* as rivers derive from their source. They are sent by God to the earth in order to receive blessings that they are in turn to confer upon humankind. There on earth, these deities as sons of God become manifest as rivers, lakes, and seas: we have *Tano* (the great river), *Bea*

¹⁹ Ibid., 52.

²⁰ Ibid., 52-3.

(river), *Bosmtwe* (lake), and *Opo* (sea). Again, the distributaries of these rivers become spirits or spirit-forces (*Asuman*) as offsprings of the river deities. All these deities and spirit-forces together with ancestral spirits flow dynamically into the human community to interact with human beings where also charms (*suman*) and malevolent spirits/witches work to disorient relationality and threaten human life. In this vision, as Metuh observes, God (*Onyame*) has placed each deity, as his intermediaries, “in charge of a different section of the universe or human need.”²¹ They work together with the ancestors (*Samanfo* or *mpanyinfo*) for the realization of divine purpose for human destiny.

The Cosmic: According to Metuh, the Igbo of Nigeria use this model. In this vision patterned on the heaven-earth relationship, *Chukwu* (the Great God) or *Chineke* (the Creator God) dwells in the heavens and is surrounded by sky deities such as the Sun-deity (*Anyanwu*), Thunder-deity (*Amadioha*), and Sky-deity (*Igwe*). On the earth aspect, *Ala* (the Earth Mother) presides on earth and over the deities that inhabit that domain. The main earth deities include the Yam-deity (*Ajoku ji* incharge of Agriculture), Divination-deity (*Agwu* incharge of medicine and health), Fortune-deity (*Ikenga*), Coercion-deity (*Aghara*), War-deity (*Ekwensu*), and so on. *Ala* together with ancestral spirits oversees morality, the adjudication of justice, the guardianship of traditional laws and customs. There is also a host of malevolent spirit-forces, witches, and sorcerers who instrumentalize mystical power for anti-social ends. According to this vision, different deities are believed to be agents of God assigned different spheres of influence to meet different human needs.²²

²¹ Ibid., 58.

²² Ibid., 60

The Social: This model is exemplified by the Yoruba of Nigeria. Their world-view is patterned on their socio-political structuration which is centered around a centralized administration under a supreme chief (*oba*). In this model, *Olodumare* or *Olorun* (God) is resident in the sky where he controls the world from a distance. Although ultimate authority resides in *Olorun*, he does not get involved in the details of administration. Rather *Olorun* entrusts such responsibility to the major divinities called *Orisha* and understood as his sub-chiefs, ministers, or agents. These major deities include *Orishanla* or *Obatala* (the arch-divinity or demiurge entrusted with the task of creation); *Oduduwa* (mythical hero and founder of divine kingship at Ile-Ife); *Onile* (Earth Mother); *Orunmilla* or *Ifa* (deity of divination, medicine, and health); *Ogun* (Iron and war deity); *Shango* (Thunder deity); *Eshu* (messenger of the deities and incharge of communications). These major deities (*Orisa*) also have their subordinates called the *Ebora*.²³ By and large, Metuh acknowledges that these models are by no means exhaustive. The reason is that there are still certain West African world-views that display more complexities and overlappings than what has been described above. What is important is that the models described are representative of some of the typical West African world-views.

Let us now proceed with the Etche world-view. From the outset, I should perhaps underline that the Etche cosmo-religious world-view fits well into the cosmic model as described by Metuh. The Supreme Deity (a terminology which is, however, no longer

²³ Ibid., 60-1.

fashionable for its deistic connotation)²⁴ is called *Chukwu* (the Great God), *Chineke* (the Creator), or *Ekemkere-Uwa* (God who created the universe). The deities include both sky and land divinities. The sky ones are *Anyanwu* (Sun-deity), *Amadioha-di-Nwanyiomugwo* (Thunder-deity), and *Igwe-ka-ala* (Sky-deity). In the Etche pantheon, “There is no known deity associated with the moon.”²⁵ Among the land deities are *Ala* (Earth Mother), *Ekii* (deity of harvest), *Ahajoku ji* (deity of yam), *Otamiriochhe* (River deity), *Agwushi* (deity of divination and medicine), and so on. These major deities (whether sky or land) have been grounded and so they have their sacred groves, cults, votaries, and priests as well as their images iconized.²⁶ The Etche believe that the spirit-forces may be benevolent or malevolent in that they may benefit or threaten human life and the community.²⁷ The ancestors together with the major deities function to ensure health, wealth, and good fortune for humankind.²⁸ This appears to be the major concern of religion in the Etche universe. Now that we have established the structure of the Etche religious universe, let me proceed to examine the nature of interaction among the different beings that populate this universe.

2.3 The Nature of Interaction of Beings in the Etche World-View

²⁴ When I use the terminology “Supreme Deity” (God) here, it is with the understanding that avoids the connotation of “Unmoved Mover” as in the sense of First in a series of movers or causes as it was used in the 19th century Natural theology. The term is, therefore, used with caution to conceptually underline that God as the Unoriginate Origin is the Creator and Originator of all existents and, therefore, enjoys an overall supremacy in a relational and dynamic fashion as the Ultimate Source of the beginning of all.

²⁵ Nwogu et al., *The History of Etche*, 88.

²⁶ Ibid., 89-90.

²⁷ Ibid., 89; see also Amaele, *The Socio-Political History of Etche*, esp. chap. 3: “Religion in Etcheland.”

²⁸ Ibid., 91.

The first point that has to be made is as it has been stated earlier, that relationality, dynamism, or flexibility guide interaction among the multiplicity of beings that populate the Etche religious universe. It is a universe that abhors stasis. In this religious universe, as Ozo-Mekuri Ndimele correctly observes, the spirit and human worlds are reputed to maintain a pendulum fluid network of relationships.²⁹ It is a religious universe in which every being is interconnected with others in a plurality of relationships. In this universe, nothing stands alone, to use the Igbo proverb popularized by Chinua Achebe: “*ihe kwuru ihe esobe ya*”—Wherever Something stands, Something Else will stand beside it. In this way, Achebe underlines how the Igbo universe abhors absolutism; “Nothing is absolute.”³⁰ It is this dynamism and relationality that allow access to the divine.

That relationality, duality or multiplicity, and dynamism undergird the essential hallmark of being in the Etche world is illustrated in its art and sculpture, music and masquerade, among others. One such prominent site in the Etche world that enshrines this question of twinness and dynamism is the famous *mbari* houses. *Mbari* houses which are found in many parts of Etcheland (especially in such towns as Mba, Umuoye, Ozuzu, etc.) provide us with significant insight into something beyond the aesthetic value of the Etche world. The word *mbari* literally means “decorated.” Usually, the construction of *mbari* houses takes the effort of the whole community in the spirit of a’we-ethos” that

²⁹ See Ozo-Mekuri Ndimele, “Language, Social and Cultural Practices in Etche,” being a Conference Paper presented at Rivers State University of Science and Technology, Port Harcourt, September 27-28, 2000.

³⁰ Chinua Achebe, “‘Chi’ in Igbo Cosmology,” in *African Philosophy: An Anthology*, ed. Emmanuel C. Eze (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2005), 67-72 at 68.

fosters solidarity.³¹ Such houses contain art works and sculptures by the communities' artists which, inter alia, "depict the portraits of great men of the past...or the conception of the activities of the...[deities]."³² What is interesting to note is that through *mbari* art, the Etche world attempts to aesthetically ground an alien or powerful force (spiritual or otherwise) in a physical figure that captures its conceivable attributes or qualities with the aim of interpreting that force. This explains why *mbari* figures are not only depictions of deities but could also be of alien human figures perceived as a threat to the safety of life and the community, like certain colonial officers. Since the Etche world is flexible and open to the irruption of alien spiritual forces, *mbari* art figures serve a mediating role especially in the face of a major crisis³³ by aesthetically capturing the attributes of such forces in order to overcome the element of strangeness and threat and to ameliorate relationships. This implies that *mbari* art forms are characterized as a process of an ongoing artistic creation not only because the Etche world is flexible but also because new spiritual forces are always likely to surface in the scene.³⁴ *Mbari* is, therefore, a transitional shrine erected to capture the attributes of forces in order to bring wholeness to the community especially after a major crisis.³⁵ The prominent figure of *Ala* (a feminine symbol of fertility, justice, life, and human flourishing), for instance, is a creative way of transmuting the sinister power of evil and human suffering into the power of life, love,

³¹ Caroline N. Mbonu, *Handmaid: The Power of Names in Theology and Society* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 124.

³² Nwogu et al., *The History of Etche*, 73.

³³ For an illuminating explication of what constitutes a crisis, see Chapter 1, sec. 1.2 at 4.

³⁴ For more on the nature of art in the Etche world, see Achonwa, *Kolokoche*, esp. 2, 30-6.

³⁵ Mbonu, *Handmaid*, 124.

and human flourishing. Thus, *mbari* is an artistic process that represents the community's attempt to bring about renewal and to fashion an alternative history that enshrines the desired experiences of the community. So, even art abhors *stasis*. Because the likelihood of the irruption of new forces was a real one in the Etche world, art becomes an ongoing process with a continuing recognition that tension, change, and movement are constant; that they form a part and parcel of life and that new visions of other relationships are always possible. Indeed, the dynamism, relationality, and openness to flexibility prevalent in the Etche world endorse the maxim that no condition but only change is what is inexorably permanent. *Mbari* art figures provide a significant clue to how the Etche world attempts to wrestle with and think through the paradoxes and ambiguities of relationships in life. Therefore, *mbari* art entrenches an ongoing process of retelling and recreating in search of an alternative history in the face of the ambiguities of life in the community in order to restore wholeness and harmony.

With regard to duality, twinness as underpinning the Etche world, the observation of Amaury Talbot, a colonial historian, provides important and insightful evidence:

In nearly all towns of importance in the Etche country, elaborate Mbari shrines are to be found, built in honor of the Thunder God. In most, just within the principal entrance, may be seen seated figure of the deity, while from head to foot and bearing in the right hand a sword, spear or bayonet, and in the left an initiation of one the old or one of the long iron scepter—rattles, or possibly another sword or dagger. By his side sits his consent, to whom various names are given, most of them apparently synonyms for the earth goddess, Ale, Ala, Ana, Aja. At Ibodo [Igbodo]...the figure represented Ala—Bride of the Bladed Thunder.³⁶

³⁶ P. Amaury Talbot, *Some Nigerian Fertility Cults* (London: Oxford University Press, 1927; London: Frank Cass & Company, 1967), 39.

Perhaps it is necessary to dwell a little bit on this observation of Talbot. Although the Etche believe that *Chukwu* or *Chineke* is the Creator of everything, they do not have an elaborate creation myth of origin.³⁷ They do not also have *mbari* depictions or images of *Chukwu* but only of the deities. Prince Amaele correctly notes that among the Etche, “there is a general belief...that God is too majestic to be always approached directly. To this fact, He (God) became worshipped through the different things He created. The most important pantheon in Etche...is the Amadioha...in Ozuzu.... Ala, the deity of the land also falls within the hierarchy....”³⁸ When Amaele speaks of God being “worshipped through the different things He created,” one is persuaded to understand this to suggest, especially in the context of the mention of pantheon, that the deities are intermediaries of God in ameliorating harmony in the world and ensuring human well-being. After *Chukwu* (the Creator of all), the most powerful deities known in Etche are *Amadioha* with his greatest sacred grove in Ozuzu and *Ala*. Indeed, *Amadioha* Ozuzu became so popular and powerful a deity that he more or less eclipsed *Chukwu*. This is corroborated by Ndimele’s submission that “Among the Etche, especially those to the West of the Otamiri River, *Amadioha* Ozuzu has practically usurped the place of *Chi* (meant *Chukwu*)...and reigns as supreme deity.”³⁹ *Amadioha* together with his Bride, *Ala* (Earth Mother) presides over justice, morality, and the protection of humans and the community. How powerful *Amadioha* was in dispensing justice, as Nwogu et al grants, won him such a popularity that “even extended to other parts of the Lower Niger from where visitors trooped to his

³⁷ Amaele, *The Socio-Political History of Etche*, 23.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ndimele, “Language, Social and Cultural Practices in Etche,” 7.

shrine to seek justice and protection.”⁴⁰ In a December 20, 2000 interview, Eze Monday Amaechi acknowledged how *Amadioha* not only assumed the status of a national deity in the Etche world but also how, to the present, it still has votaries across various communities in Etche.⁴¹

From the evidence provided above, it is clear that in the Etche religious universe, *Chukwu* (God) is neither gendered nor has a wife; *Chukwu* has no daughter or son. *Ala*, the powerful Earth Mother who presides over all the earth deities, is the bride of *Amadioha* rather than of *Chukwu* as depicted in the *mbari* art as seen above. There do not exist any *mbari* arts (or houses) figuring *Chukwu* (who, by the way, is imageless because never represented in any concrete form)⁴² seated with *Ala* by the side as bride. Only the deities and others form the Etche *mbari* pantheon; *Chukwu* is not one among them. This complete absence of any patrilineage ascribed to *Chukwu* in the Etche universe is very instructive. It preserves the real transcendence of God as the wholly, albeit, relational other. We shall return to this later. But suffice it for the moment to underline that the *mbari* art figure of *Amadioha* with *Ala* by his side, as documented by Talbot, highlights the fact of relationality and twinness as the hallmarks of the Etche pantheon which entails a mixed community of divinities of both female and male. For nothing stands alone, nothing is absolute. Twinness as the ground of relationality fosters a balancing act in ameliorating harmony of interrelationships in the Etche spiritual universe. *Amadioha*’s

⁴⁰ Nwogu et al., *The History of Etche*, 88.

⁴¹ Interview with His Royal Highness, Eze Monday R.A. Amaechi, Onye-Ishi-Agwuru, Ozuzu, Mba-Asa, at Ozuzu, December 20, 2000, by the Etche Study Group.

⁴² Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2005 reprint), 111.

influence as the powerful male Sky-deity seems to be counterbalanced and checked by the powerful *Ala* as a female deity. This has enormous implications with regard to the experience of power relationships between women and men in the different areas of life in the society, be it politics, economy, religion, and so on. In her book, *Daughters of Anowa*, Mercy Amba Oduyoye studied some Ghanaian and Nigerian myths of origins and religions (precisely, Yoruba, Ijaw, and Ibibio of Nigeria). She drew attention to the prominent role played by female deities, some of which assumed the status of the Supreme Creator God. By and large, she systematically came to the conclusion that in male-dominated cultures, the only women who are given a modicum of respect are those who do not resist letting themselves be sacrificed for the follies of men with the reward of deification (as in the case of *Aiyelala* who became the Okitipupa deity of sexual morality and fair play).⁴³ Thus when twinness, flexibility, dynamism, and relationality are distorted or corraded, it introduces disharmony, marginalization, oppression, and subjugation in women-men relationship. Such a corraded relationality lets the men off the hook while making women the sacrificial lambs. Imperative is, therefore, the need to maintain a delicate balance between matrifocality and patrifocality as evidenced not only in world-views but even currently as practiced in certain West African societies such as the Akan of Ghana. Oduyoye is on the mark when she writes:

Neither patriarchy nor matriarchy alone can transform relationships between men and women. Indeed, these relationships comprise a good deal of what we mean by living fully. If we view patriarchy and matriarchy with the image of a pendulum, we see them at opposite sides, and we know that the pendulum eventually will stand still in the middle. If, instead, we look at the relations between men and women as a spiral, we see that life is move-

⁴³ Ibid., 26-9.

ment and being, a continuum of dynamic creative and empowering relationships moving ever upwards.⁴⁴

Oduyoye's insight here is very pertinent. Unlike radical Western feminist resistance rhetoric that calls for the supplanting of patriarchy with matriarchy as an only alternative, it is germane to underline that neither patriarchy nor matriarchy alone suffices. Etche-African motif of relationality abhors absolutism. Difference is only found, strengthened, and enriched in relationality.

In the Etche religious space, all the beings that populate it are enmeshed in a constant movement of interrelationships. There is continual flow of traffic between the visible world inhabited by humans and the invisible realm inhabited by God, the divinities, other spirit-forces, and the ancestors as shown in the cosmic model above. As Justin Ukpong notes, "while these [dimensions] are [recognized as] distinct spheres of life, they are to be seen as interrelated and mutually influencing one another."⁴⁵ It is evident from the taxonomy of spirits in the different models described above that each deity is assigned a different competent area of human need. The numerous spirits, therefore, play specialized roles or functions (in their areas of competency/agency) within the overall framework of divine economy. The goal of interaction of the different beings in the Etche world-view is for the realization of divine purpose for human well-being and

⁴⁴ Ibid., 34. Some African sources from the perspective of social scientists that argue for the reinvention of the duality of gender relationships in the organization of African societies include, Ifi Amadiume, *Re-Inventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion and Culture* (London/ New York: Zed Books, 1997); idem, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (London/New jersey, Zed Books, 1987); Cheikh Anta Diop, *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa: The Domains of Matriarchy and of Patriarchy in Classical Antiquity* (London: Karnak House, 1989) and a host of others; idem, *Civilization or Barbarism: An Authentic Anthropology*, ed. Harold J. Salemson and Marjolijn de Jager, trans. Yaa-Lengi Meema Ngemi (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1981; New York: Lawrence Hill Books, 1991).

⁴⁵ Justin S. Ukpong, *Essays in Contextual Theology* (Lagos, Nigeria: Campbell Publishers, 1995), 134.

cosmic harmony.⁴⁶ The holistic quality of the Etche world-view (which abhors dichotomy but not distinction between the sacred and the profane) shows that dynamic relationships bear resonances in the social, economic, religious, and political concerns of the Etche society.⁴⁷ Because of the constant traffic between the sacred and profane realms of existence in the Etche universe, every aspect of quotidian everyday life becomes not only a sanctified but also a spiritualized experience.⁴⁸ One area in the Etche universe that evidences the interactivity and interconnectedness of the two realms is in the diagnosis of disease by *dibias* (medicine men or diviners). As Robin Horton has illustrated:

Through the length and breadth of the African continent, sick or afflicted people go to consult diviners as to the causes of their troubles. Usually, the answer they receive involves a god or other spiritual agency, and the remedy prescribed involves the propitiation or calling-off of this being. But this is very seldom the whole story. For the diviner who diagnoses the intervention of a spiritual agency is also expected to give some acceptable account of what moved the agency in question to intervene. And this account very commonly involves reference to some event in the world off visible tangible happenings.⁴⁹

It is clear from this that for the Etche (African), the spirit world and the material realm form a spider-like web of relationships such that what happens in one realm has impact on the other. For the Etche, the two worlds cohere and interweave and the human being is at the center of it. It can be described as anthropocentric. Metuh is right in observing that

⁴⁶ Metuh, *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions*, 70-1.

⁴⁷ Mbiti rightly observes that “Africans are notoriously religious.... Religion permeates into all the departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it.” See John S. Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (London: Heineman Educational Publishers, 1989), 1.

⁴⁸ See Evans M. Zeusse, *Ritual Cosmos: The Sanctification of Life in African Religions* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1979), 3.

⁴⁹ Robin Horton, “African Traditional Thought and Western Science, I,” *Africa*, vol. XXXVII (January 1967), 53.

“the dichotomy which is so characteristic of Graeco-Christian world-view is strikingly absent in African world-view. There is no...opposition between the visible and the invisible, the material and spiritual, the temporal and non-temporal, the sacred and the profane.”⁵⁰ This belief is exemplified, inter alia, in the association of deities with material objects (like rocks, rivers, trees, mountains, sun, moon) and natural phenomena; and this association should not be understood to mean identity as some who would be quick to term it animism⁵¹ are wont to do. Contrary to this view is the Durkheimian functionalist reduction of the soul of religion to the idea of society and communal (social) needs which has nothing to do with the material/profane order reduced to the realm of private and personal concerns.⁵²

⁵⁰ Metuh, *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions*, 51.

⁵¹ The term ‘animism’ (from the Latin *anima*, meaning soul or spirit) is said to have been coined by Edward Burnett Tylor in 1871 in his attempt to account for the origin of religion. Tylor opined that “savages” or primitives originated religion as a rational effort (which, according to him, was, in the end irrational scientifically speaking) to explain how the natural world worked on the basis of the analogy of the human being as animated by a personal soul or spirit: “as souls animate persons, so spirits must animate the world.” This unfounded speculative theory thus purports that, for “sages,” inanimate objects possess spirits. From a religious purview, many scholars have objected to this claim as minimalist. See Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom*, 2 vols., 4th rev. ed. (London: John Murray, [1871], 1903), 1: 429, cited in Daniel L. Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 2nd ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), esp. chap. 1., “Animism and Magic: E. B. Tylor and J. G. Frazer,” at 27. It is to be noted, however, that Africans do not believe that inanimate objects have personal souls or spirits nor do they attribute any to them, although such objects may become icons of the deities for good. But that things can become icons does not mean the same thing as possessing personal souls or spirits. Such a terminology, therefore, fails to capture the true nature of African religious matrix. The African consciousness of a commonplace divine-human, sacred-profane interactivity, is what the early missionaries, anthropologists, and ethnologists either mistakenly or out of ideological bias and insufficiently examined assumptions tagged animism. For more on this, see Geoffrey Parrinder, *African Traditional Religion* (London: SPCK, 1962 and New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 20-1.

⁵² See Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1915), 419.

2.4 God as Transcendent-Immanent

Although, as mentioned above, the Etche do not have any elaborate myth of creation, yet it is believed that there exists One (Supreme Deity) God who is the creator of all. According to Amaele:

The acknowledgement and worship of God in Etche right from origin has not been in doubt. It did not come as a result of Western interference as some...hold. Hence, Chukwu (big God), Ekemkere-uwa (the creator of the universe), Chineke (the spirit that creates), Onyenwe-uwa (the owner of the world), are among the different names of God in Etcheland. These names have been in use before the coming of the missionaries.⁵³

There is no account of how this God created whether directly or indirectly through a demiurge (as in the case of the Yoruba cosmology in which *Olorun* assigns *Obatala* with the task of creation). But the naming of God in the Etche world-view as in the Igbo tradition invites further scrutiny. What does it really mean to say that among the Etche, *Chukwu*, as Amaele points out, has been acknowledged and worshipped right from origin without any shred of doubt? How can we justify this stress on the worship of One (Supreme) God and the question of a multiplicity of spirits? Why the multiplicity of spirits and of what is their use to religion? How can we explain the manner of the relationship between God and the numerous deities as well as that between God, the deities, and human beings? Is this God the same God that the Etche West African Christians also acknowledge and worship as the Trinity of Persons (God-Christ-Spirit)? If so, how are they the same and where lies the novelty? These questions will occupy us.

In the first place, just as the Etche acknowledge *Chukwu*, the Ashanti *Onyame*, the Yoruba *Olodumare*, as the One God, no one today seriously believes that the concept of

⁵³ Amaele, *The Socio-Political History of Etche*, 23.

God in ATR is a missionary fabrication or a borrowed one. However, among Igbo scholars, matters of controversy over the use of the nomenclatures, *Chineke* and *Chukwu* (Creator and Supreme Deity), has not been avoided. Achebe has drawn attention to the hypothesis that the word *Chineke* could be a hasty merging of the names of two distinct deities *Chi* and *eke* by the early missionaries to designate the Creator God of Christianity without taking cognizance of the tonality of the Igbo language.⁵⁴ In a non-cosmological sense *chi* refers to the alternation of daylight and night, that is, the going and returning of daylight (*chi-obubo* and *chi-ojiji*) or to simply day (*ubochi*). But in a cosmo-religious sense *Chi* may mean God, guardian spirit or deity, or the idea of purveyor of destiny/fortune. Whereas *Eke* is a word which translates several things depending on tonality and usage: market day, to tie, to share, to create, snake, a spirit. Thus, the meaning of a combination of the two terms “*Chi-na-eke*” depends on the tonality assigned to the word “*na*” (which could mean *who/which*, *does*, or the conjunctive *and*). In the first instance, *Chineke* would mean *Chi* who/which creates; in the second, *Chi* does create, and in the third, it becomes *Chi* and *eke*. Because of the Igbo penchant to think in terms of duality, Achebe is inclined to upholding the missionary hasty fusion of a dual deity, *chi* and *eke*.⁵⁵ The issue, however, remains unresolved.

With regard to the word *Chukwu* used to refer to the Igbo Supreme Deity, Donatus Nwoga and Christopher Ezekwugo, among others,⁵⁶ would prefer that the word

⁵⁴ Achebe, “‘Chi’ in Igbo Cosmology,” in *African Philosophy*, 71.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ See Donatus I. Nwoga, *The Supreme God as Stranger in Igbo Religion* (Imo State: Hawk Press, 1984); Christopher U.M. Ezekwugo, *Chi: The True God in Igbo Religion* (India: Mar Matthew Press, 1987); see also Chukwu Azuonye, “Igbo Folktales and the Evolution of the Idea of Chukwu as the Supreme

be dropped. Against the backdrop of Igbo republicanism, Nwoga contends that the concept of *Chukwu* as Supreme and Absolute Being is an aberration and a stranger to Igbo traditional thought. Again, from a pragmatic and utilitarian viewpoint, Nwoga argues that Chi (the true Igbo God) satisfied all the needs that the Igbo would expect from transcendence and hence rendered redundant the idea of a Supreme God since there was no felt need for him.⁵⁷ These scholars claim that the name, *Chukwu*, was the epithet of a local deity of the Arochukwu clan which became valorized and imposed on all of Igboland. According to this position, the missionaries to Igboland found the name apropos and immediately adopted and uncritically identified it with the Supreme Being of deism and with the Yahweh of the Judeo-Christian tradition. With fascinatingly documented evidence, these scholars attempt to rather prove that *Chi* is the only God in traditional Igbo thought. Whether or not Nwoga and the others have proved their case beyond reasonable doubt remains to be said. Achebe, however, rejects the claims of the Arochukwu or missionary invention of *Chukwu*. From the beginning, “Igbo traditional thought in its own way and style,” Achebe writes, “did recognize Chukwu as the Supreme Creator, speculating only on the modalities, on *how* He accomplished the work and through what agencies and intermediaries. As we have seen He appears to work through chi to create man (emphasis original).”⁵⁸

Whereas Nwoga deems the question of *Chukwu* (Supreme Being) as

god of the Igbo Religion,” *Nsukka Journal of Linguistics and African Languages*, no. 1 (April 1987):43; Michael J.C. Echeruo, “A Matter of Identity,” *1979 Ahiajoku Lecture* (Owerri: Culture Division of Ministry of Information, Culture, Youth and Sports, 1979).

⁵⁷ Nwoga, *The Supreme God as Stranger in Igbo Religion*, 64, 67.

⁵⁸ Achebe, “‘Chi’ in Igbo Cosmology,” in *African Philosophy*, 72.

irreconcilable with the ethos of Igbo republicanism, Achebe locates their congruity in the dynamism, flexibility, and relationality that characterize Chukwu's supremacy. Thus, in recalling the myth of Igbo origin, Achebe draws attention to how *Chukwu* (God) exercised power/authority in a consultative manner with Nri and Adama, the founding kings of the Igbo nation:

Ezenri and Ezadama came from heaven and rested on an ant heap; all was water. Cuku (Chukwu) asked who was sitting there and they answered "We are the kings of Nri and Adama," thereupon Cuku gave them each a piece of yam; yams were at that time unknown to man, for human beings walked in the bush like animals...⁵⁹

This myth narrative did not just end there. Achebe remarks that "Later on Chukwu tells Ezenri how to plant and tend the yam, but Ezenri complains that the ground was too wet; and Chukwu advises him to send for Awka people—workers in iron—to blow on the earth with their bellows and make it dry."⁶⁰ The narrative, according to Achebe, highlights *Chukwu* as exercising his power in relational and dynamic way by engaging the founding heroes in conversation. To my mind, it is clear from this Igbo (West African) myth sample, that God's power is not exercised to dominate and homogenize but is rather respectful of difference. It is exercised as "power-with" rather than as "power-over." Precisely as power-with, it promotes collaboration, participatory engagement which encourages genuine plurality. Indeed, the "Supreme God in the African religious world view is conceived to be accommodating of other powers as he is ecumenical. It is this religious belief in the ecumenical character of God, together with

⁵⁹ Northcote W. Thomas, *Anthropological Report on the Ibo-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria*, vol. 1 (London: Harrison & Sons, 1913; New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969 reprint), 50, cited in Achebe, *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

his flexibility, that helps us make sense of the welcoming and accommodating character—a spirit of unity in diversity—prevalent in Africa’s traditional religion.”⁶¹ And what is more, Achebe continues, “Chukwu Himself in all His power and glory did not make the world by fiat. He held conversations with mankind; He talked with those archetypal men of Nri and Adama and even enlisted their good offices to make the earth firm and productive.”⁶² In this way, Achebe conceives *Chukwu*’s dynamic, flexible, and relational sovereignty as not incompatible with the Igbo ethos of republicanism. Metuh has also drawn attention to different parts of Igboland that used *Chukwu* simultaneously as the epithet for God which cannot be traced to either the alleged Aro clan colonialism or missionary invention.⁶³ At any rate, the pay-off of the thesis of Nwoga’s school is that we may not naïvely affirm the supremacy of One God amidst the multiplicity of spirits as well as the identity of the God of ATR in relation to the Judeo-Christian God without caution or rigorous effort and critical justification.

Moreover, on the question of the relationship between God and the deities, some theories have been put forward. One such theory is that espoused by Mircea Eliade which borders on the withdrawal of the Sky god from the world. Eliade had opined that in primitive societies, “the god of the sky seems so far beyond human reach that other religious conceptions must come in to replace him. Often these new conceptions are gods of the rain and storm, deities who are more concrete and personal, more directly involved

⁶¹ Iheanyi M. Enwerem, *A Dangerous Awakening: The Politicization of Religion in Nigeria* (Ibadan, Nigeria: IFRA, 1995), 20.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ See Emefie Ikenga-Metuh, *God and Man in African Religion: A Case Study of the Igbo of Nigeria* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1981).

in human life because they specialize in one task.”⁶⁴ Other stories with regard to how God used to live in close proximity with human beings in an original state of equanimity before withdrawing far away from the world of humans are widespread.⁶⁵ But does the myth of the withdrawn God really mean that the God of ATR is otiose? Is God’s transcendence or distance coextensive with otioseness? Contra Eliade, I do not think that the alleged withdrawal of the so-called Sky god is the condition of possibility for the emergence of the deities or, for that matter, of religion in any African world-views. As we have seen from the different models of the West African world-views above, God is conceived to be the Source of all other beings. For the Etche, *Chineke* is the Creator of all; for the Akan, the deities (*Abosom* the source of *Asuman*) derive from *Onyame* as from a river Source; for the Yoruba, *Obatala* (demiurge) is assigned by *Olodumare* with the task of creating the world and human beings. Yet God’s dynamic and flexible transcendence rather seems to allow for the independence of the deities in their collaborative agency toward the realization of divine economy for the well-being of humans and the world.

No doubt, in the Etche world, *Chukwu* (God) only has a name but not image because as we saw above, there is never any artistic representation of the image of God in

⁶⁴ Cited in Daniel L. Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 2nd ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 206; see also Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism*, trans. Philip Mairet (New York: Sheed & Ward [1952 French] 1969); idem, “Methodological Remarks on the Study of Religious Symbolism,” in *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology*, ed. Mircea Eliade and Joseph Kitagawa (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), esp. 103; idem, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, [1956 French] 1957).

⁶⁵ See Edwin Smith, ed., *African Ideas of God* (Edinburgh: House, 1950), 216 and 233; Geoffrey Parrinder, *African Traditional Religion* (London: SPCK, 1962 and New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 40-1.

the *mbari* houses. It speaks to the mysterious quality of God. It is only the deities that figure in the *mbari* houses. Besides, God, in the Etche world-view is also never depicted as having a wife. God is transgender and transsex. Only the deities such as *Amadioha* and *Ala* have gender and sex ascribed to them. Again, there is no sacred grove or temple dedicated to *Chukwu* in Etche, no cult, no special devotees, and no institutionalized priesthood.⁶⁶ This is all a pointer to the transcendence of God which allows God to maintain an equi-distance with each and all. Everyone and not merely some special devotees or chosen can turn to God in prayer at any time and anywhere. For example, Amaele makes this instructive observation:

In Etche, although God is believed to be everywhere at every time, yet His abode is up the sky. This is why an average man or woman when forced to unbearable circumstances by neighbours raises up his or her two palms to the sky saying: 'My God see my two palms, they are clean, if I merit what I am suffering you know better. If not, then you that fight for the widow or helpless or childless should please interfere.' God is perceived as an impartial judge, overseer, and loving.⁶⁷

This is a way of saying that the same God who is believed to dwell in the heavens is equally present and near, caring and providing, listening and protecting. God can be invoked by anybody like the man/woman referred to by Amaele or even by the community. In the above instance, the prayer is addressed directly to God without any recourse to the deities or ancestors as the case may be. Amaele maintains that one of the proofs for the belief in the nearness of God among the Etche is evident in the theophoric proper names that they take or that parents give to their children. Such names are, for

⁶⁶ Interview with His Royal Highness, Eze Monday R.A. Amaechi, Onye-Ishi-Agwuru, Ozuzu, Mba-Asa, at Ozuzu, December 20, 2000, by the Etche Study Group.

⁶⁷ Amaele, *The Socio-Political History of Etche*, 23.

example: Chukwudi (God exists), Heanyichukwu (nothing is beyond God's control); others are Chinonso (God is near), Chinazo (God protects), Chinwikpe (God is the impartial judge), Chibuzo (God is the way), Chibuike (God is strength), Chinaza (God who answers), Daberechi (leaning on God), Chimamkpa (God knows a person's pressing need), and so on.⁶⁸

Nevertheless, albeit God can be approached directly as in the case of the man/woman praying directly to God with uplifted hands toward the sky, yet the deities, the ancestors, and other mediums function in their areas of competency assigned to them by God for the amelioration of human good and the world. Among the Ashanti of Ghana, there is also no temple for *Nyame*. The closest there is is the "*Nyamedua*, a three-forked branch supporting a pot into which food items are put as offerings to God."⁶⁹ The pot which also contains rainwater symbolizes how the nearness of God provides for the needs of humans. But even at that, it is clear that the *Nyamedua* (God's tree) is not an image of *Nyame* but only a symbolic three-pronged branch. And even among the Igbo, Francis Arinze has drawn attention to sacrifices made directly to God but they are so rare that the ordinary Igboman/woman may not be aware that they are offered at all.⁷⁰ Also, the Nupe of northern Nigeria speak of the nature of God as *Soko lokpa*, which means, "God is far

⁶⁸ Ibid; see also Mbonu who has provided an illuminating discussion of the meaning and significance of names and naming in an African cultural setting. Most importantly, she points out that names within that symbolic universe are not mere collocation of words but are bearers of history, family story, culture, tradition, world-views, and so on. See her book, *Handmaid*, esp. chap. 4.

⁶⁹ Kwesi A. Dickson, *Theology in Africa* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1984), 53; cf. Geoffrey Parrinder, *West African Religion* (London: Epworth Press, 1961), 15.

⁷⁰ Francis A. Arinze, *Sacrifice in Igbo Religion* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1970), 54.

away, yet...he is present always and everywhere.”⁷¹ When all is said and done, these examples indicate that God is believed to be truly transcendent; yet that transcendent God is “still considered to be close enough to be approached formally in worship [like the offering of sacrifices], and more especially informally in ejaculatory statements featuring the God-name....”⁷² From all this, it becomes obvious that, according to facts on ground, the myth of the withdrawn God in ATR who is ordinarily approached through intermediaries or ministers, does not present the entire picture. While the fact of mediation is the case, it is clear that direct prayers and sacrifices are also made to God without recourse to the intermediary of the deities. Besides, prayerful and worshipful attitudes are also exhibited toward the deities and ancestors as though they were self-sufficient.⁷³ One must admit that the issues are complicated and so may not easily be resolved or explained away.

Transcendence or distance as understood in the Etche African matrix is not coextensive with absence. Rather, God as the transcendent is concretely mediated. Perhaps this explains why Amaele states broadly that “there is a general belief among the people [of Etcheland] that God is too majestic to be always approached directly. To this fact, He became worshipped through the different things He created. The most important...are... Amadioha...Ozuzu and...Ala, the deity of the land.”⁷⁴ This suggests an understanding of the nature of God’s transcendence as a mediated presence. Although,

⁷¹ S. F. Nadel, *Nupe Religion* (Routledge, 1954), 11, cited in John V. Taylor, *The Primal Vision* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 86.

⁷² Dickson, *Theology in Africa*, 53.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 55-6.

⁷⁴ Amaele, *The Socio-Political History of Etche*, 23.

Amale admits that direct prayers are made to God as seen above, his position still does not say it all since the deities in the Etche world are also often approached (independently devoid of any reference to God) in a worshipful attitude suggestive of their autonomy. His position, nevertheless, draws attention to the fact that reality is never unmediated. Amale's reference to divine majesty as the condition for God being worshipped indirectly tends to resonate with a particular insight of Evans Zeusse: "Power unmediated is terrific and breaks boundaries. Power as it is disseminated in articulated divine order is good." He goes on to remark, "God does not involve himself too directly in the world that he sustains, for too particular and intense an involvement might destroy the fabric of the divine order he sustains."⁷⁵ Is it really because unmediated divine power is terrific and perhaps destructive that God becomes distant or withdrawn as Zeusse seems to suggest? To my mind, I would rather think that transcendence preserves the holy Mystery which is God such that even if God is present, such presencing does not exhaust the reality that is God. The holy mystery of God is not provisional by nature so as to veer toward the non-mysterious once unraveled and elucidated. Mystery is characteristically essential to God.⁷⁶ For a God that is completely known and appropriated becomes an idol.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Zeusse, "Perseverance and Transmutation in African Traditional Religions," in *African Traditional Religions*, 174, 175.

⁷⁶ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2007), 217.

⁷⁷ In place of the idolatrous mould of speech about God (ontotheology) that has characterized much of Western thought, Marion has suggested the metaphor of "icon" for proper speech about the disclosure of the divine. What characterizes the icon is its "saturation." The icon, accordingly, is drenched with superabundance, inexhaustibility or surplus of meaning. It is so saturated a phenomenon that no single concept can exhaust its meaning. In its saturatedness, the icon functions as a type of translucent window through which God, the holy mystery comes as a trace and gazes upon us and comes to us in a form of self gift without being circumscribed in the icon. The icon equally functions in leading us back into the embrace of divine life and love. Even though God graciously reveals himself in history as an act of divine love,

Therefore, the distance which is of the nature of God should rightly be characterized as a transcendent-immanent and as a mediated presence but never absence or abdication.

Bénézet Bujo is right on target when he writes:

Much of what has been written about Africa's 'absent God' must be considered mistaken. God is not far from the African world. All relationships, between person and person, living and dead, and between persons and nature, are rooted in God and point towards God and towards the end of all things in God. *They (all those relationships) have a sacramental nature*, proclaiming that every person's future lies with God (emphasis mine).⁷⁸

One significant point that needs to be made is that the understanding of God's transcendence in a dynamic, flexible, and relational sense carries social and political ramifications which bear out in the Etche world. The operational liberty—informed by God's transcendence—with which the deities function in their specialized roles toward the realization of God's provident purpose for the world impacts on the Etche socio-political organization. As Amaele aptly puts it:

In Etche generally, democratic process of administration...is essential because every village is a republic of its own. The local administration is the responsibility of the council of elders...and...community assembly of which every grown-up is a member. The entire community congregation de-

theology should avoid undue theological hubris. For such an approach which transgresses the limits of epistemic humility fails to acknowledge the inadequacy of human concepts in the speech about God at any time. See Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995). Idolatry may not basically reside in the pure and simple identification of a god with its image either by thenaiveté of some so-called heathens in a far away dark savage corner of the globe or by "some priestly fraud." Idolatrous attitude goes deeper than such jejune identification. Idolatry resides more in the subjection or subordination of the god to the conditions structured by humans under which the experience of the divine is made possible. In this sense, the god appears to be spellbound under the magical control of human beings who determine how and to what extent the god should be known. This attitude, paradoxically, could be present in religious systems that profess Jesus as Lord. Understood this way, idolatry may well be present even in the very same religious systems and persons (no matter how anti-idolatrous and anti-superstitious they may claim to be) who condemn it in others.

⁷⁸ Bénézet Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, trans. John O'Donohue (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006), 32.

cides important issues affecting the villagers.... Every grown-up...has the right to express his views on any matter raised.⁷⁹

One sees here how the Etche world-view impacts, inter alia, how life is organized in the society. Rather than threatening God's supremacy and authority, the dynamism and flexibility of divine hierarchy promotes, as we have seen above, inclusive and participatory relationships in divine administration. In the Etche socio-political engineering everyone has the right to express one's views on any issues. This right which is often expressed as "*onye kwuo uche ya*" (let each say his/her mind on matters of concern to him/her) highlights the respect accorded the dignity and independence of every human being. Discussion and consensus rather than imposition by absolute fiat are ideals held in highest esteem in the socio-political process by the Etche. Social and political administration in the Etche world appears to be patterned on such inclusive and participatory model informed by its world-view. Amaele is right on target when he observes: "It is evident that in Etcheland, political powers are shared among various groups, bodies and individuals. The absence of any centralized authority as the basic political unit is the feature of the Etche people."⁸⁰ It is clear that in this kind of administrative structure, authority rather than being threatened is balanced and enhanced through the participatory and collaborative genius of all involved in the process. This kind of republicanism, no doubt, neutralizes the tendency to dictatorship and autarchic unilateralism.

Interestingly, it is striking to note that even among the Yoruba who practice a

⁷⁹ Amaele, *The Socio-Political History of Etche*, 43-4.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 45.

centralized political system of administration under a supreme chief (*Oba*), power is not exercised in a strictly authoritarian way. Yoruba myths portray *Olodumare* as King and the *Orisa* (deities as shown in the social model above) as divine representatives or sub-chiefs, or administrators of the kingdom. Power and authority in the Yoruba kingdoms are “widely dispersed among partly independent town units, whose leaders are chosen by the people as counterweights to the central authority.”⁸¹ The Yoruba *Oba* is viewed as a divine king. His sacrality shields him from immediate contact with the people since sacredness, whether of human or divine, has to be mediated. Hence he rather governs the kingdom by a widely dispersed exercise of power through his sub-chiefs in council who are closer to the people. Typically, it is an oligarchic monarchy. This kind of participatory administration rather than threatening or diminishing or compromising the power of the *Oba* as Metuh is wont to suggest,⁸² enhances it while at the same time neutralizing autocratic tendencies. Consequently, “the Yoruba *Oba*, in spite of the religious aura which surrounded him as a divine King, if found unpopular, could be deposed...by his council.”⁸³ Thus, despite their centralized socio-political organization under a supreme divine king to whom they owe obedience and loyalty, the Yoruba abhor absolutism. Neither are they “unquestioning in expressing their allegiance to authority.”⁸⁴ These societies we have been considering differ from the Hausa-Fulani societies in northern Nigeria, for instance. Islamic jihadists in the late 18th and early 19th centuries

⁸¹ O. Nnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension, 1978), 133.

⁸² Metuh, *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions*, 60.

⁸³ Nnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, 133.

⁸⁴ Enwerem, *A Dangerous Awakening*, 15.

championed by Uthman dan Fodio had “brought the North under a centralized authority that was vertically hierarchical, despotic in character and highly stratifying of the polity.”⁸⁵ In such autocratic monarchy, as in the case of northern Nigeria, authority is given a sacred sanction by the Islamic religion and the Hausa emir could only be deposed by his overlord, the Sultan of Sokoto.

Perhaps it is also worth noting that prior to the advent of Islam and Christianity in Nigeria, for instance, there were no religious conflicts in the name of the Supreme God of ATR. As Iheanyi Enwerem underlines, “people in Africa were not involved in religious conflicts until the intrusion by the Islamic and Christian religions, each claiming to possess the only true God and, consequently, each less than tolerant of other religious world views.”⁸⁶ But as we have seen above, the dynamic, flexible, and relational transcendence of God in the Etche (or Igbo, Yoruba, Akan) cosmo-religious universe is accommodating of collaborative exercise of power. The dynamic and flexible transcendence of God as the condition of possibility for the multitude of deities to freely exercise their independent agencies in carrying out the tasks assigned them by God in specific areas of human needs within the framework of divine economy precludes conflict. In this connection, violent competition is structurally eliminated within divinity. Nigerian Nobel laureate, Wole Soyinka, speaking of tolerance and respect for otherness as the hallmarks of his Yoruba *Orisa* religion insists: “the religion of the *orisa*, abhors such principles of coercion or exclusion, and recognizes all manifestation of spiritual urgings as attributes of the complex disposition of godhead. Tolerance is synonymous

⁸⁵ Ibid., 14.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 21.

with the spirituality of the black continent, intolerance anathema.”⁸⁷ Soyinka is here condemning the exclusivist monotheistic rhetoric of the two foreign religions that intruded Africa, Islam and Christianity, with their penchant for intolerance and totalization. God’s transcendence which, as articulated in the Etche world-view, entails God’s gender-neutrality, no institutionalized cult/priesthood/devotees, no temple, and no image represented in *mbari* figures, means that God is beyond instrumentalization and appropriation. Every religion in and of itself has something good about it. Yet it can be abused by its adherents for negative and violent purposes. The multiplicity of deities in the West African religions can and have been instrumentalized by their specific devotees for negative ends. While Enwerem and Soyinka are right, yet their position veers toward romanticism. They tend to ignore the fact that some societies in Nigeria have war deities whose services are enlisted to do violence during inter-ethnic and other forms of conflicts. For example, the Etche (and Igbo) have *Ekwensu*⁸⁸ and the Yoruba have *Sango*.

⁸⁷ Wole Soyinka, *The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness*, W.E.B. Du Bois Institute (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 88.

⁸⁸ I agree with Metuh that the figure of the “Devil” was introduced into most African cosmologies from without by colonizers and missionaries. Western ethnologists, anthropologists, sociologists, and especially Christian missionaries and theologians have endeavored to ascertain in ATR the equivalent of the concept of the devil as it is in Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions. This campaign in most cases succeeded, according to Metuh “in introducing this being [the devil] into an African system where it never existed before or have been conferred his sinister attributes on a being which never had them.” A classical example to buttress Metuh’s point about such a grand falsification can be found in the Etche and Igbo cultures. In Etche cosmology, *Ekwensu* originally was the war-deity. So understood *Ekwensu* could be evil or good depending on the context. When a person ordinarily became violent to the point of inflicting unnecessary harm or causing misfortune to others and hence to the community, then s/he was said to be possessed by *Ekwensu* which in such a circumstance was regarded as being an evil spirit. But even at that, it is still a choice on the part of the one to inflict the harm on others and not necessarily because *Ekwensu* is ontologically evil. On the other hand, *Ekwensu* may be viewed as a good spirit in times of war when it is invoked and pressed into service to empower the warriors who fight to defend their community against the onslaught of aggressors. Thus the context determines the good or negative connotation ascribed to *Ekwensu*. It is about relationships that could either diminish or defend and promote life as the case may be. But then it is this very deity, *Ekwensu*, which the missionaries identified as the equivalent of the Christian

It should be recalled, as we have established, that these deities enjoy operational liberty in their responsibilities. But they can be instrumentalized for good or for ill. However, it remains correct to insist that God in the Etche and the other world-views we have seen does not inspire and could not be instrumentalized for violence thanks to his transcendence.

2.4.1 God's Transcendence and the Inter-Relational Agency of the Spirits

From the models of the West African world-views that have been described above, one thing that appears to be suggestive is that the deities are the intermediaries or agents of God as Metuh underlined. It is true that the Etche, for example, recognize *Chukwu* as the Creator and who exercises supreme authority over all of creation. Yet *Amadioha* and *Ala* who preside over justice and oversee morality are revered as the most powerful deities. They are so close to and involved in the life and quotidian affairs of the people that in certain parts of the Etche country, *Amadioha* has almost taken the place of God as intimated above. According to Ndimele, the ancestors and one's personal *chi* also have a hand in the tide of a person's life.⁸⁹ In the Yoruba cosmology, *Olodumare* entrusted the task of creating the world to *Obatala* who even introduced imperfection in creation because he got drunk with palm-wine. Among the Ashanti, the deities (*Abosom*,

concept of the devil, the supreme author of evil and the archenemy of God thereby inserting the calcified Gnostic dualism into an African system where it never existed. It is this name Ekwensu that has come to translate the devil in the vernacular version of the Christian Bible today. But from what has been explained above, it is clear that Ekwensu is not the equivalent of the Christian Devil. See Metuh, *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions*, 153-4. This concept of the devil has gained a nearly if not irreversible status especially among "Born-Again" Pentecostals, Charismatic Renewal groups, healers in the healing and deliverance ministries, and in African magic movies' industry.

⁸⁹ Ndimele Ozo-Mekuri, "The Etche Nation in the New Millennium," being a Paper presented at the Etche Development Conference (University of Port Harcourt, May 3, 2000), 7.

water deities) are sometimes described as sons of God because they derive from him and, therefore, share his spirit or nature. They are, not surprisingly, considered by the Ashanti as intermediaries or delegated ministers of *Nyame*.⁹⁰ They are also considered as executioners for God since they enjoy the liberty of punishing offenders by sometimes bringing death and destruction upon outlaws.⁹¹

But above all, in ritual situations (private or communal), the deities are offered prayers following the same modality for praying to God. Arinze has drawn attention to an example of morning prayer to Chukwu and the deities in the Igbo tradition: “Chineke (Ezechitoke) ekene; Ani ekene, Igwe ekene.... Taani oji; Ogbuefi nnam...taa oji (God greetings; Earth, greetings, Sky, greetings.... Take kola all; Ogbuefi my father [ancestor] take kola.”⁹² These examples seem to give a suggestion of looking at the deities as self-sufficient entities. Do their seeming self-sufficiency rival with God’s? Are they in competition with God? There is no easy solution to the question of the relationship between the stress on One God and a multiplicity of divinities in ATR. Nonetheless, as Kwesi Dickson cautiously suggests: “The most one can say is that God’s self-sufficiency is never in doubt, even if other deities may be recognized and worshipful attitudes adopted before them.”⁹³ One may deduce from Dickson’s cautious insight that the apparent autonomy and independence of the deities do not diminish God’s sovereignty

⁹⁰ Dickson, *Theology in Africa*, 56.

⁹¹ Ibid., 56-7.

⁹² Arinze, *Sacrifice in Igbo Religion*, 25. Other samples of such prayers have been discussed by Christopher D. Ejizu, *Ofo: Igbo Ritual Symbol* (Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1986), 87; Ezekwugo, *Chi: The True God in Igbo Religion*, 230.

⁹³ Dickson, *Theology in Africa*, 59.

and supreme authority. It is the case that in these West African world-views, the dynamic and flexible transcendence of divine hierarchy creates the condition of the possibility of the deities exercising their functions in their respective areas of competency with liberty for the good of human beings in the world. Indeed, Kwame Gyekye clearly states:

“Although the deities were created by God, they are considered in Akan theology and cosmology to have independent existence of some sort; they operate independently of God and in accordance with their own desires and intentions.”⁹⁴ All this goes to show an inclusive relational rather than an exclusive absolutist divine hierarchy as the hallmark of the Etche religious universe. While the supremacy of God is not diminished, the multiplicity of deities, ancestors, and other mediums independently play specialized but complementary roles in the different areas of human need assigned to them within the framework of the divine economy. Having seen so far how dynamism, flexibility, and multiplicity undergird the relational being in the Etche cosmo-religious universe, let me proceed to treat in a more specific way how the multiplicity of relationships structure or shape the realization of individual human destiny.

2.5 The Relational Understanding of Person in the Etche World

From the sample models of West African world-views we have seen above, it is obvious that the human person occupies the center of a universe (visible and invisible) structured by a network of dynamic relationships. There does not exist any elaborate myth of the creation of the human person in the Etche cosmology. However, it is believed

⁹⁴ Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), in *African Philosophy: An Anthology*, 468-9.

that the human person comprises the following dimensions:⁹⁵ *ahu* (the material body); *ume-ndu* (breath or life or breath of life; the animating principle which ceases when the person dies); *obi* (which could mean either heart or soul depending on usage. Understood as soul, it is an undying part of the person which only departs from the person and returns to God at death); *mmuo* (the human spirit; it is this part of the person that can leave the body at night to wander about and engaging in certain activities while the person is sleeping much like in the dream. Before the person wakes up, the spirit returns to the body. If it is attacked by witches or other evil spirits or stopped from returning to the sleeping body, then the person unable to wake up dies. It is also this spirit that goes to the ancestral realm). Then there is *chi* (the personal deity, destiny or guardian spirit, the bearer of fortunes, and the personal creator assigned by God to each person. *Chi* returns to God at death. Through *chi*, God is ontologically linked to each person). Finally, there is *eke* (ancestral guardian spirit manifested in the form of excellent virtues, character, or physical resemblances as received from God).

Accordingly, God endows a unique creative agent called *personal chi* who creates each person. One can, nevertheless, draw on the proverbs and beliefs of the Etche. A significant Etche proverb says: “*Chi abughu otu*”⁹⁶ meaning *chi* is not one. This maxim can enable an insight into the people’s belief. As we have seen above in the analysis of the word *Chi*, it is used here in this maxim in a cosmological rather than non-

⁹⁵ See Ndimele, “Language, Social and Cultural Practices in Etche,” 6-7.

⁹⁶ See Iheanyi O. Obisike, *The Orthography of Echie with Proverbs* (Port Harcourt: Harrisco, 1993).

cosmological sense. Cosmologically, it may mean God, guardian spirit, or destiny.⁹⁷

Since it has already been established that the Etche believe that God is One and Supreme, then *chi* as used in the maxim does not apply to God. To say that *chi* is not one, therefore, means that each person has a unique creator *chi*. Indeed, an Igbo proverb makes this point clearer: “*ofu nne n’amu ma ofu chi adi eke*”⁹⁸ meaning one mother may give birth (to different children) but each child is created by a unique *personal chi*. *Chi* is thus responsible for the individuality of each person because no two persons have the same *chi*. It is *chi* that humanizes each person. Ndimele has remarked that in Etche, “The personal deity is commonly called *chi*. The tide of a person’s life is ascribed to his [or her] *chi*.”⁹⁹ *Chi* not only individualizes and humanizes a person but is also dynamically connected to personal self-actualization and achievement. Although the tide of a person’s life may be controlled by his or her *chi* (à la Ndimele), it is also true as we have seen earlier that the Etche abhor absolutism. That explains why absolute power concentrated in one’s personal *chi* is abhorrent to the Etche, hence the proverb: “*Onye kwe chi ya ekwe*” meaning if a person agrees, his or her *chi* also agrees. This supports the characteristic dynamism, flexibility, and relationality that ground the republican ethos of the Etche, the Igbo, and others as we have seen above.

According to the Etche anthropological assumption, each person is ontologically

⁹⁷ Destiny here is to be understood in the sense of an existential project; it embraces all that God has packaged for a person from preexistence. Destiny, therefore, entails the idea of being (existing) while having an awareness of the potency to become fully self-actualized. It is this projective course of self toward a life that is fully lived in a way that benefits others that drives and sustains an ongoing process of creativity and becoming. Through the presence of *chi*, one’s being is in becoming. It is this process of ongoing becoming that the Greek *stasis* abhors or rather conceives as imperfection.

⁹⁸ Achebe, “‘Chi’ in Igbo Cosmology,” in *African Philosophy*,

⁹⁹ Ndimele, “Language, Social and Cultural Practices in Etche,” 7.

linked to God through his or her personal *chi*. *Chi* which is the spiritual dimension of the self constitutes the intimate point of access into God. As a personal deity, *chi*, in the traditional Etche world, has a cult in every *mbala* (the woman's hearth) and in ritual situation is offered prayers and sacrifice.¹⁰⁰ Because of the intimacy with one's *personal chi* and the desire to have one's destiny realized, there is not infrequently the temptation to accord more importance to the *personal chi* than to God or the deities. Ezekwugo provides a sample morning prayer addressed to *Chi* which, albeit, is for him the true name of the Igbo God represented by the *ikenga* symbol/cult (the male symbol of achievement): “*Ife-Jioku taa oji; Chi-m taa oji; Nnaa fa taa oji; Chi Okafor taa oji; Chusiasialanu-m ndi ajo muo* (Ife Jioku, eat kola; My chi eat kola; My ancestors eat kola; the chi of Okafor, eat kola; Drive away from me the evil spirits).”¹⁰¹

Nevertheless, each person is equally loved and gifted by God. That is why another Etche aphorism says: “*Chi ana aka ibe ya*” which means no one's own *chi* is greater than another's. No person is more unique than another. Everyone has the same equal dignity rooted in the presence of God in each person through his or her *personal chi*. Indeed, *chi* is the *imago Dei* in each human being.¹⁰² Each person is therefore, considered to be of

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Madam Eunice Nwamegwu Nweke and corroborated by Madam Mgborie Nweke both of Obite, January 28, 2000, by the Etche Study Group.

¹⁰¹ Ezekwugo, *Chi: The True God in Igbo Religion*, 230, 236-241.

¹⁰² The notion of *chi* understood as God's guardian-spirit indwelling every individual and thus makes God present to each individual, is a valuable resource for intersecting the Biblical Holy Spirit with spirits in African religion. It is the Holy Spirit who unites the Father and the Son in communion and who indwells every believer. She effectuates both the horizontal communion of believers, one with another, as well as the vertical communion of all believers with the Trinity, and makes the Trinity present to every believer. When *chi* is appropriated to the Holy Spirit who indwells each person, then the Holy Spirit becomes the entrée into the Triune God. The Spirit also makes each person intimately present to God just as *chi* links God ontologically to each person. The Spirit, according to the relational anthropology of the Etche tradition, is thus, the proper entrée into the mystery and life of the Trinitarian God. The Spirit is the entry

value. No individual is thus swallowed up in the “we.” This speaks to the irreplacibility and irreducibility of every person. By extension, no one community is more unique than another. Our gifts may be different but none is more unique than another. According to Elochukwu Uzukwu, “Among the Igbo this spiritual element [*chi*] is the basis of the creativity of the individual person in community.”¹⁰³

In fact, the multiplicity of *personal chi* responsible for the multiplicity of individuals as well as distinct gifts and destinies is the condition of possibility for human interactivity and relationships in the community. Difference and multiplicity as seen through the lens of destiny undergird human interaction for mutual enrichment. The identity of a person is constructed and nourished within the framework of complex relationships. Indeed, the self becomes a self at all only through living intercourse with other selves and within networks of personal, social, cultural, and natural relations.¹⁰⁴ *Chi* opens a person up to go beyond the self toward others. In the light of this framework, any claim to an individual self-sufficiency unto oneself wars against friendship and solidarity of others. Charles Nyamiti’s observation is *ad rem*: “The deeper one’s communion is with others, the more fully he or she will be a person. Since personality is nourished by communication, the more we communicate to others, the more we deepen and discover

point or contact between humanity and God in communion of life and love. The dominance of spirit experience in ATR is a valuable resource for rearticulating a trinitarian theology beginning with the Spirit as the access to encountering the God of Jesus Christ.

¹⁰³ Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 107.

¹⁰⁴ See Taylor, *The Primal Vision*, 65.

our personality.”¹⁰⁵ To be sure, relationship is not simply an avenue toward self-realization. Rather it is essentially a way of being person. Personhood is being as communion.¹⁰⁶ Individualism breaks down communication, participation, solidarity of others, and consequently, institutes egoism, stasis, and eventual death. *Chi* abhors stasis (in the Greek sense that views motion, dynamism, or flexibility as imperfection) and engenders movement to self-beyondness. In this movement, creativity unleashes newness and new possibilities.

Now let me further buttress the point made above with an investigation of another West African (Akan) notion of person. The Akan anthropology clearly illustrates how relationships constitute personhood. According to this anthropology, the human person is composed of at least seven elements as summarized by Peter Sarpong.¹⁰⁷ The first is *mogya* (blood) which is inherited from the mother; the blood which makes the person a biological being constitutes the material aspect of the person; it connects the person to the clan system thereby giving him or her status and membership within a lineage, and obligations as a citizen in a matrilineal society; this part of the person dies. Then there is *okra* or *kra* which is the soul (though not simply reducible to the soul); it is the individual personality and it has a cult; it is the guardian spirit assigned to each person as well as the humanizing aspect of the person. It is the undying part of the person which he

¹⁰⁵ Charles Nyamiti, “God in African and Christian Contexts,” *Essays on African Theology* 1 (Kipalapala, Tanzania: Unpublished, 1977), 155.

¹⁰⁶ See John D. Zizioulas, *Being As Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985).

¹⁰⁷ Peter K. Sarpong, “The Individual, Community, Health, and Medicine in African Traditional Religion: The Asante Model,” *Pontificium Consilium pro Dialogo inter Religiones Bulletin* 28, no. 3 (1993): 271-280, in Uzukwu, *A Listening Church*, 36.

receives from the Supreme Being.¹⁰⁸ *Okra* or *kra* can be said to be the equivalent of the Etche and Igbo *chi*. The *kra* “receives a destiny package from God on behalf of his ward and sees to the realization of the content of this predestined lot which is believed to be unalterable.”¹⁰⁹ Another element is the *sunsum* (spirit) or a spiritual preexistent principle. It is changeable and dynamic and, therefore, subject to either growth or diminution, being strengthened or weakened. It can, however, be trained to be heavy instead of being light; for to be lightweight is to easily fall prey to the activity of witches. It is the principle which determines the character and individuality of the human person. Gyekye calls it the activating principle in the person.¹¹⁰ There is the *ntoro* which is a spiritual element received through the father which calls for the respect accorded one’s father. Post-puberty, the person becomes guided by his or her own *ntoro*. Accordingly, the *sunsum*, *ntoro*, and *kra* make a spiritual being. Then there is the *sasa*, the avenging part of the human person which urges wrongdoers to confess wrongs afflicted on others. And finally, there is the *saman*, which is the form a person assumes after death; it is the form in which the spirits of the ancestors exist.

Clearly, one can see from the Akan human type how the personal spirit that undergirds West African anthropology is structured by a multiplicity of relationships. In this connection, by virtue of the *ntoro*, the person belongs to his father’s kinship group; through *mogya*, the person is linked to his matrilineal clan; through *kra*, the person is

¹⁰⁸ Pobee, *Toward an African Theology*, 49.

¹⁰⁹ Metuh, *Comparative Studies*, 176.

¹¹⁰ Kwame Gyekye, “The Relation of *Ōkra* (Soul) and *Honam* (Body): An Akan Conception,” in *African Philosophy: An Anthology*, 60.

inextricably related to God. Truly, therefore, to exist, to be a person, is essentially to be related. It is this interlinked complex of relationships that socially define a person. And one can only continue to be a person only by nourishing and deepening these relationships. As indicated above, these relationships not only bestow status but also accrue obligations to the person which invite the person to go beyond the self in order to move toward, to reach out to others. Thus, the West African human type abhors *stasis* which is against motion, change, newness, and the possibility of alternative relationships. Relationality lies at the core of sociality and society. Because each person is endowed with a unique destiny, then each needs the experience, endowments, services, and contributions of others for their comparative advantage¹¹¹ since God did not give all destinies to one person, but some to one person and some to others, so that all have need of each other. Diversity, difference, and plurality thus invite relationality and sociality. Personhood as a nexus of relationships is aptly expressed in the beautiful African apothegm, “I am because we are and we are because I am.” To put it differently, a person’s existence, worth, and identity are realizable only within the matrix of communal and cosmic web of relationships that shape them. At the same time, the order, function, and worth of community are only possible because of the personal contribution of its individual members.

A crucial point worth stressing is the freedom of persons to creatively actualize their destinies, albeit, always in collaboration with their individual *personal chi*

¹¹¹ Ridley makes reference to David Ricardo’s Law of Comparative Advantage in order to underscore the importance of the symbiotic context of human interaction in society on the basis of difference. For as long we are each better at some things than others, then we all gain from each other through the medium of exchange and make up for each other’s lack since no one person can be better at all things at the same time. See Matt Ridley, *The Origins of Virtue* (London: Viking, 1996), 207-9.

(guardian-spirit). The need for destiny realization incites persons unto an ongoing movement or process of auto-realization through creativity and diligence toward a life that is fully lived. To attain such a fully lived life necessarily entails communion of life with others. Francis Njoku lends credence to this vision as he writes:

Part of the affirmation of human dignity and auto-creation [in West Africa] is in doing something in which the self shows itself as living. [This]...auto-creation needs not be in manual or intellectual work but an expression of the self in its authentic individuality where one communes and shares realistically with others no matter how little. As an existent-subject, one contributes to the world of humanization and affirmation.¹¹²

It is small wonder then that individuals in the Etche world are at least known or recognized for something. It could be for their prowess, creativity, success, and achievement. For example, a great or master wrestler is *di-mgba* (*di* could mean husband or master in the sense of adept while *mgba* means to wrestle); a great yam farmer is *eze-ji* (king of yam); a woman who uses her talents to increase the wealth of her family is recognized as *okpata-aku*; a great peacemaker is “*ome udo*,” and so on. Everyone is recognized by what he/she does best. The individual creativity is recognized and not necessarily swallowed up in the “We.” An Etche proverb that aptly captures this perspective says: “*Ekobebe ulo, ekota onye ogologo*” meaning literally, “when hanging the roof of a building, the need for a tall person becomes evident.” Put another way, everyone has his or her own irreplaceable place. It can be said that it is the individual’s achievements and actualization of destiny within the complex of relationships that

¹¹² Francis O.C. Njoku, *Essays in African Philosophy, Thought and Theology* (Enugu: SNAAP Press, 2002), 151.

enunciate and affirm him/her as a human person.¹¹³

What we have highlighted so far regarding the notion and place of the individual person in West African anthropologies flies in the face, for instance, of Robert Schreiter's distinction between individualist and collectivist cultures within an intercultural communicative matrix. Drawing on the views of certain sociologists, Schreiter holds that in the individualist culture, a member feels affirmed since an intercultural communication event that engenders openness and creativity would have displayed the novelty of an uninhibited autonomous individual. Whereas within the collectivist position into which Schreiter lumps Africans, he suggests that "members...would see 'openness and creativity' as a potential deviation and a lack of group solidarity. Innovation of any type needs to be seen as either rediscovery or a reaffirmation of the group's knowledge, ethos, and solidarity. Hence, collectivist cultures prize the enrichment of new information in a way that is different from their individualist counterparts. New information is just a way of saying something we already know."¹¹⁴ Schreiter's suggestion here appears to insinuate that at the long run, there is no element of newness, new possibility, or surprise

¹¹³ Similarly, Achebe captures this fact in his classic novel *Things Fall Apart*. The protagonist Okonkwo had worked himself through thick and thin to success as a great farmer. He also became the strongest and best wrestler in Umuofia his clan after throwing Amalinze the cat (so called because his back never touched the ground) who remained indomitable for seven consecutive years. As a fierce fighter he never despaired in the face of failure even though the fear of failure was his worst nightmare which drove much of his impetuosity and impatient brusqueness with the less successful and those he deemed weaklings. His successes and achievements were believed to have been thus accomplished because he collaborated with his *chi* and he was recognized as such by his community since as Achebe notes, his (Okonkwo's) clan, "judged a man by the work of his hands." Consequent upon the recognition of his prowess and achievements, Okonkwo was chosen by the nine villages that make up his community as an emissary to deliver a message of impending war to their enemies if they did not fulfill the conditions for repairing the harm they had inflicted on a member of Okonkwo's community. See Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1985), 17-19.

¹¹⁴ Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 37.

in the African cultural matrix since whatever an individual comes to know or create would merely be a rediscovery, a reaffirmation, or a recollection (perhaps in the Platonic sense of *anamnesis*)¹¹⁵ of “something we already know.”

This view of Schreiter is counterposed by the Etche (and Akan) anthropological conception as has been exposed in the forgoing paragraphs. In these world-views, not only does the community, its culture, and principles shape the individual’s values and actions, but the community itself, its culture, and values are also shaped by the individual’s rational creativity, imaginations, and ingenuity.¹¹⁶ Individual persons are self-determined free participants and active collaborators in the pursuit of the humanization and *bonum commune* of the community rather than anonymous, passive, and conformist elements used by the community to carry out its own schemes. In this context, moral obligation is seen in terms of the duty that persons consciously owe to themselves and others in the mutually beneficial relationships that exist in the community. Within this mutual and symbiotic relationship between the community and the individual, the interests of the community and the individual are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they are coextensive. In this light, African communal ethos is not the same as collectivism. It is thus, instructive to note that there is a subtle distinction between collectivism and African communal ethos which I have described elsewhere.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ See above, Chapter 1, 17n29.

¹¹⁶ Polycarp Ikuenobe, *Philosophical Perspectives on Communalism and Morality in African Traditions* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 77.

¹¹⁷ It is important to distinguish between the communal ethos as understood and practiced in Africa and collectivism as practiced elsewhere in some parts of the globe. In the African setting, while acknowledging the role of community in forging the individual’s identity, the community does not usurp the place of the individual as a unique entity with inalienable rights and dignity, to be treated as an end in him/herself. In collectivism, the individual person has no legitimacy apart from the collective. Since the collective is the

As has been made clear, the human person in West African socio-cultural matrixes is conceived in terms of a multiplicity and plurality of relationships. A person cannot be a person in isolation and as an abstract entity. While one's individuality is irreplaceable and irreducible, a person is always the product of a socio-cultural milieu.¹¹⁸ In the Etche anthropology under consideration, the human person is seen as divine, as spiritual, and thus of having dignity and worth on account of being ontologically connected to God through a *personal chi* (or *kra* for the Akan). It is this spiritual element that is fundamentally determinative in the actualization of destinies and hence, in the forging of relationships. The personal spirit enables a human subject's openness to God and as well the self-actualization of a person through creativity in openness to others, community, and toward the harmony of the socio-cosmic process. Crucially, while one's destiny may not be altered, it is, however, susceptible to the malevolent influence of the deities, witches, and sorcerers who use power for ill. Because they have the freedom to employ power to act negatively, they can partially marr a good destiny and can even kill out of jealousy. This explains the importance attached to mediation in the Etche

sole source of meaning and value, it arrogates to itself power in order to be in control; since nothing in the entire society matters except insofar as it contributes to the collective or carries out its programs, collectivism is a menace to the individual because it totalizes and thematizes the individual. Rather than self-determined participation (wherein lies moral responsibility), activity degenerates to response at the behest of the collective; rather than personal initiative and creativity, what prevails is passivity and robotic acceptance. Indeed, the collective renders its members, nay, its elements, if not similar, homogenized, and passive, then anonymous and compliant. Rights are only those granted by the collective, so they offer no defense of the individual with respect to it, especially since the code of law and the procedures of adjudication that would secure rights are created by the collective on its own behalf and not necessarily originating from the dignity of the individual as created by God and imbued with God's Spirit (*chi*). Consequently, collectivism always tends toward domination of persons, authoritarianism, or totalitarian control. Collectivism, therefore, stands at a remove from what African communal ethos represents. See O. C. Njoku, "Igbo Communal Ethos," in *Against All Odds*, 355, 363n44.

¹¹⁸ O.C. Njoku, "Igbo Communal Ethos," in *Against All Odds*, 354.

religious universe. In what follows, I will examine the place and role of mediators and spirit possession geared toward the amelioration of human destiny.

2.6 Mediation in the Etche Cosmo-Religious Universe

In view of life as the greatest gift of God and the need to actualize one's destiny, the Etche take seriously the question of protection against the malevolent powers, including their human agents. The need for mediation foregrounds the important role played by diviners, medicine-men, and other mediums, who come under the influence or guidance of the right spirits or deities. Uzukwu is right in pointing out that:

In African mystical experience the *Supreme Being never mounts* [that is to say, never possesses] anybody; only *His deputies who are emissaries mount* and give messages for the good of the community. In this way, God's dynamic distance is maintained, and God's spirit is encountered in inspired or possessed emissaries (emphasis original).¹¹⁹

Guided by this insight, it immediately becomes clear that God's dynamic transcendence as seen previously is the condition of possibility for God's emissaries to carry out the task of possession particularly in their area of expertise. Spirit possession is a common phenomenon in most of West African religions.¹²⁰ In the Etche religion someone can be possessed by *Ekwensu* (war-deity), *Ala* (Mother Earth), *Agwushi* (divination/medicine-deity)¹²¹ for the good of the community and the realization of human destiny. In the phenomenon of possession the entrancing deities or spirits temporarily become manifest in their chosen and communicate through them. But medicine (*ogwu*) which engenders

¹¹⁹ Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, "The Word Became Flesh: Areas and Methods of Inculturation in the 21st Century," in *The Church in Nigeria: Family of God on Mission: Acta of the First National Pastoral Congress* (Lagos, Nigeria: Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, 2003), 123.

¹²⁰ Metuh, *Comparative Studies*, 222.

¹²¹ For more, see Nwogu et al., *The History of Etche*, 90.

cure and healing can also be used in pernicious and antisocial ways to cause harm and misfortune to people through, for instance, *nshi* (poison).

Diviners (*Babalawo* in Yoruba, *Dibia* in Etche and Igbo, etc) and other mediums can be possessed by the deities to equip them with not only power but also knowledge and messages for the good of others. What is interesting to note is that this vocation is not the prerogative of one sex or gender. Hence, men and as well as women can be possessed by the deities to serve as priests/priestesses, and to be practitioners of medicine, or mediums.¹²² Also, both male and female deities play complementary roles in the phenomenon of possession. For example, *Ala* (female deity), *Idemili* for the Igbo (the deity of peace and daughter of *Chukwu* and *Ala*), can mount their elects as much as the male deities can. For nothing is absolute. Twinness or multiplicity is also at work in spirit possession.

Ideally, the purpose of spirit possession is for those entranced to help others and restore especially the sick to holistic health and harmony in the community. Spirit possession provides access to divine presence and power. Taylor rightly noted: "It is not the doctor's [or diviner's] expertise as a herbalist or bone-setter which gives healing, but the power of God and of the...[spirits] working through him. For a great part of his work also consists of spiritual diagnosis, revealing the dividedness that makes patients vulnerable or the undetected malice that works as witchcraft."¹²³ Taylor's insight can be said, among others, to point to the prophetic dimension of spirit possession that

¹²² See Parrinder, *West African Religion*, 37, 101; R. S. Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), 39.

¹²³ Taylor, *The Primal Vision*, 150-1.

empowers persons to engage in responsible praxis on behalf of the oppressed and victimized.

In order to function effectively as a *dibia* or diviner, a person does not become one overnight. Rather, in Etche religious landscape, for instance, a prospective *dibia* who has discerned the signals of the vocation by *Agwushi* indispensably undergoes a long and rigorous training or apprenticeship. Growing up in this culture, I have personally witnessed the apprenticeship of *dibias*. During this training, the novice is familiarized with certain rituals that would not only strengthen him but also facilitate his rendezvous with and sensitization to the divinity. At the end of the rigorous training, he goes through the complex initiatory rite of *isa-anyà* which literally means the “cleansing of the eyes with certain medicines” (empowerment for trances, for seeing and hearing the voice of the spirit) which may last for a designated number of days. This ritual symbolizes the death of the *dibia* to the old and a transformative resurrection into a new way or mold of being. It transforms the personality of the *dibia* and activates his/her ability to begin to see beyond the physical and the ordinary and to tap into the domain of the spirit’s inaccessible to non-initiates. It equips him/her with special knowledge and wisdom unavailable to the rest of the people. Worthy of pointing out is that, though, the metamorphosis of the *dibia* grants her/him celestial access and the height of intimacy with the spirits, s/he does not cease being a woman/man living under the human condition on earth. Thus, the diviners play an agentive role in the fulfillment of the greatest goal of ATR, to oblige “God to come down to earth, to renew his closeness to man, to descend to him in order to divinize him,”¹²⁴ and to bring about the realization of

¹²⁴ Dominique Zahan, *The Religion, Spirituality, and Thought of Traditional Africa*, trans. Kate E.

His (God's) benevolent purpose for human well-being and wholeness. The phenomenon of spirit possession, therefore, has an overriding social and relational orientation as the diviners, the dibias, or priests, henceforth live their lives at the expense of the worshippers and community.¹²⁵

It is this traditional dimension of spirit experience that has, no doubt, been appropriated and assimilated into West African Christianity today. Whether it is in Pentecostalism (though it claims to reject all that has to do with ATR as devilish and demonic) or in African Independent Churches (AICs), or in Charismatic Renewal Movements, or among priest-healers, the dimension of spirit possession has been re-dimensioned, reformulated, and assimilated into the qualities of the all-powerful God and the insurgent Universal Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit now possesses the prophet-diviner, evangelist, charismatic and priest-healer figures in order to empower them for the mission of liberating those under the clutches of the devil, witchcraft, and of healing the sick.¹²⁶ These rebranded diviners claim to be in the fullness of the Holy Spirit and to possess spiritual powers to dislodge and undo the activities of evil spirits and of their agents. They are successful in this prophetic praxis and resistance struggle against sinister forces that diminish life because they take the sufferings, fears, and stories of their clients seriously.¹²⁷ The phenomenon of Spirit possession thus becomes an indomitable force

Martin and Lawrence M. Martin (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 17.

¹²⁵ See Parrinder, *West African Religion*, 91.

¹²⁶ Nathaniel I. Ndiokwere, *Prophecy and Revolution: The Role of Prophets in the Independent African Churches and in Biblical Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1995), esp. chap. 7.

¹²⁷ See Nathaniel I. Ndiokwere, *Search For Security: Freedom From Sinister Forces that Threaten Life in African Society*, 2nd ed. (Onitsha, Nigeria: Effective Key Publishers, 1995), 58.

that empowers for resistance against evil that diminishes or destroys life in order to engender human flourishing, abundant life, and freedom. We shall investigate the importance of the AICs as far as the repackaging and rearticulation of the Christian gospel in the light of ancestral religious assumptions are concerned in Chapter 5. There, we shall also expand the insights of the AICs by reinterpreting the multiplicity of spirits and deities in West African religious universe as refractions or manifestations of the Universal Holy Spirit in the realization of Divine universal salvific purpose.

2.7 The Pitfalls and Strengths of the Etche-African Relational Framework

So far we have established that relationality, flexibility, and dynamism guide relationships in the Etche religious world-view. God's dynamic hierarchy allows for the dispersal of power which enhances collaborative and participatory administration of divine economy. While this may be its key strength, it at the same time creates room for its woes.

Pitfalls: Perhaps I must point out that the dynamic, flexible, and relational structures of the Etche (and likewise Akan, Yoruba, etc) anthropology are not without their own pitfalls. [a] One such weakness is the tendency to parochialism, clannishness, and ethnicism. While these must be guarded against, I insist that they do not, however, detract from the excellence of relationality as a valuable contribution of the West African matrix for negotiating difference in our world today. [b] Again, the importance and the sometimes near-dominance accorded the cult of *chi* (*kra* for the Akan, *ori* for the Yoruba) in a bid to achieve one's destiny tend to occlude the place of the Supreme God or even the deities. [c] Moreover, the framework of relationality which undergirds all

relationships in the Etche religious universe creates the condition of possibility for the instrumentalization of the spirits and deities by their devotees and priests/priestesses for anti-social purposes. [d] At the same time, the deities can also in turn take advantage of their independence to turn malevolent. [e] It also enables agents of malevolent forces like witches and sorcerers to tap into mystical power to be deployed for ill. Nevertheless, these possible pitfalls should not eliminate from view the significance of relational religious anthropology as providing an other paradigm for negotiating another discourse on God and difference.

Strengths: [a] Relationality as an overriding criterion and core tenet of being in the Etche religious universe guards against absolutism, despotism, and autarchic unilateralism. In this way, it promotes and enhances collaborative and participatory administration. [b] God's dynamic transcendence is accommodating of plurality, and tolerating of difference (male and female deities). This carries significant message and implication for ecclesial and socio-political structures and organization. It is also relevant for interreligious dialogue. [c] The dominance of the relational understanding of personal spirit that undergirds West African anthropology invites a reinterpretation of Trinitarian theology from an African perspective. There is no doubt that the question of God as the Father of Jesus Christ was a radical novelty introduced to West Africans by missionary Christianity.¹²⁸ But it is clear from the discussion so far that the question of One God and spirits was no stranger to the Etche and other West African religions prior to the advent of Christianity. There is no question that the relational and dynamic understanding of

¹²⁸ See John S. Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1986).

God and the dominance of spirits was easily assimilated into the qualities of the Triune God preached by Christian missionaries. This is evident today in the predominance of the phenomenon of Spirit possessions and other Spirit-related phenomena that characterize West African Christianity. West Africans rearticulated the Christianity they discovered with their re-dimensioned traditional dimensions of spirit experience. The functions of the multiplicity of spirits (for example, for healing, for protection from sinister forces, for favors, and so on) have been creatively reconfigured and subjected to the Holy Spirit in West African Christianity. West African relational religious anthropology invites a revision of the Trinitarian taxis from the traditional God-Christ-Spirit to God-Spirit-Christ which fosters pneumatology as the viable entrée into the Triune God. [d] West African religious universe is fundamentally focused on the amelioration of human well-being. [e] The lack of conflict built into the structure of God's dynamic hierarchy precludes war and violence from being deployed in the name of God. This is a contribution from which Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions can learn that violence is not to be carried out in the name of God. These are some excellent values that West African relational religious anthropology can contribute to enrich world Christianity.

2.8 Conclusion

From what has been said so far with regard to the dimension of spirit experiences in Etche-African cosmo-religious world-view, certain clear facts do emerge. Primarily, relationality is the fundamental thread that is woven into the warp and woof of the said *weltanschauung*. God's dynamic and relational hierarchy allows for power-with rather than power-over. The human person ontologically linked to God through a personal *chi* is valued as sacred and as having an irreducible and irreplaceable worth. The litmus test of all

human and non-human behaviors and activities lies in determining whether they enhance and promote life or diminish life thereby instituting disequilibrium in the socio-cosmic process. In the face of anti-life forces, the spirit mounts persons in order to use them to ameliorate health, destiny, and overall wholeness. This is a prophetic praxis against oppression and domination. The beautiful values provided by the dimension of spirit experiences from West African world-views may be the elixir for relearning hospitality, friendship, and solidarity of others in our globalized world. The ambivalence inherent in globalization, rather than abetting the clash of civilizations¹²⁹ (as some are wont to suggest) could become a *kairos* for the “dialogue of cultures and among civilizations” according to the United Nation’s 2001 convention marking the Year of Dialogue, for a more peaceful pluralistic world.

¹²⁹ See Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Image Books Doubleday, 1992); Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East and the West* (Indiana: University of Indiana Press, 1964).

Chapter 3

The Spirit as the Lord and the Giver of Life: Rearticulating Relational Pneumatology

3.1 Introduction

The Niceno-Constantinopolitan creedal profession acclaims the Holy Spirit as the Lord and the Giver of life. But the question of how the Spirit has been giving life both within and out-side the church remains at issue. From what I have elaborated in the previous chapters, it is clear that the Spirit has more often than not been domesticated. Thus, structures that should be giving and promoting life have been and continued to be used to spawn a spiral of violence and diminution of life. Where has the Spirit been giving life? Whose life is it that the Spirit has been giving? Is this life limited to only certain group of people or a particular religion? Is one life more important than another? As Lord, does the Spirit exercise power to resist violence and anti-life forces and structures and to work out liberation on behalf of the oppressed? Does the Spirit abhor body and difference? There may be more questions than answers. But this range of questions would prove helpful in mapping the contours of a theology that engages our contemporary pluralistic age in a fashion that unleashes a redemptive and liberative alternative.

In this chapter, I will first investigate certain biblical tropes which are helpful for rearticulating the doctrine of the relational Spirit as the Lord and Giver of life. Mindful of the elusiveness and mysterious nature of the Spirit, we recognize that metaphors are

better tools than mere concepts to speak about the Spirit. The next section shall thus focus briefly on the import of metaphors as well as certain metaphors or symbols of the Spirit. This takes us to the question of Spirit and embodiment. Are they opposed or related? Again, we shall examine the universal Spirit as Mediator of both the creative and prophetic presence of God who has been giving life to the entire creation and empowering humanity even before the incarnation of the Word. In doing this, particular attention will be given to an understanding of the work of the biblical *rûah*. The role of the Spirit in the life and ministry of the Messiah, in the church and the question of pluralism will be looked into. Equally to be treated is the formulations of embodiment within Christian tradition with regard to the Spirit and salvation. Here we shall focus on Irenaeus of Lyons and Augustine of Hippo. On the basis of the fruit of these explorations, I shall argue in the next section for the need to reclaim the dignity of difference. In the final part, I contend that there is need for broadening our concept of sin in a way that truly engenders genuine conversion that will promote justice and solidarity of the “other” who is a neighbor. All this is inspired and made possible, as we shall conclude, by the relational and life-giving Spirit.

3.2 The Spirit as the Lord and the Giver of Life

As already pointed out in Chapter 1, the Spirit has been neglected in Roman Catholic systematic theology for a number of reasons. Some of those reasons have been clearly marshaled out. But among all the reasons, we noted that it was in order to preserve God’s transcendence, and hence God’s freedom as articulated in classical theism that the Spirit through whom divine relationality is concretely mediated in the world paled into insignificance. Classical theism feared that recognizing relationality in God

would detract from God's utter otherness by predicating necessity and dependence to God. But it is significant that from the evidence adduced in the preceding chapters, what needs to be stressed is that relation and freedom in God, whether *ad intra* or *ad extra*, are not contradictory. God in his absolute freedom and transcendence graces God's other (all creation) with God's self-gift, presence, love, and care, not out of constraint but freely. In other words, God's transcendence and immanence are correlative rather than contradictory. God is present throughout the whole world and indwells every human being through the pervasive presence of the relational Spirit. Thus in neglecting the Spirit in Latin systematic theology, what was actually eliminated from view is "the mystery of God's personal engagement with the world in its history of love and disaster... God's empowering presence... through-out history... calling forth the praxis of life and freedom."¹ Indeed, what was neglected is the mystery of the Person and the activity of the relational Spirit in the world. For the mystery of the absent-present God, God who is ever-coming, ever drawing near, interrupting us, and passing by, God who comes in a trace, is experienced as the energy and power of the Spirit. God is in the world and the world is in God through the presence of the Spirit.

Again, as I noted in Chapter 1, from about the second half of the twentieth-century, however, a new interest in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit emerged. Some have described this new upsurge as a new advent of the Spirit. An interesting feature about this new advent has been a spate and profusion of books on the Holy Spirit. Although a good number of these books have shed light on the Holy Spirit, most still concern themselves,

¹ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997), 131.

for instance, with the Spirit's pro-cession *in abstracto* and the near-objectified Spirit as *vinculum amoris*. That well taken, how-ever, much still remains to be done and made clear with regard to the outreach of the divine Spirit to and in creation in general and human beings in particular in their social and historical situatedness. This lacuna is the location of my concerns in this section.

We may not speak adequately about the Spirit today especially in the light of our pluralistic context without factoring in the notion of relationality. The universal pervasive presence and cosmic breadth of activity of the Spirit penetrate every spectrum of life engendering the interconnectivity and community of all life forces. Because the divine Spirit—so-called because she is not estranged from life here but vivifies it—operates universally in giving and affirming life, the Spirit could be recognized in everything that ministers to life and resists its destruction, says Jürgen Moltmann.² There has been a tendency in traditional theology to limit the operation of the Spirit to indwelling the soul, to faith, to church institutions and as having nothing to do with the so-called profane domain. This spiritualization of the Spirit led to the separation of the Spirit from body and embodiment, from nature, politics and economics, and indeed from all that is counted to belong to the secular. Yet it is well to note that the Bible is replete with a certain notion of the Spirit as the divine power and presence that inter-penetrates all nature and all aspects of life. Before proceeding further to elucidate this fact, foremost, however, I should like to clarify briefly how the term “Spirit” would be understood here. As also mentioned in Chapter 1, to the understanding of the Spirit pursued here must be added

² Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), xi, “Preface.”

both the impersonal and personal characters of the Spirit as they are complementary rather than mutually exclusive.

3.2.1 Spirit: Terminological Clarification

Very often, the notion of spirit conjures up that which is immaterial, ghost-like, discarnate, invisible, ethereal, vapid, and vacant. This construal might not be entirely unconnected with the translation of the Holy Spirit in the King James Bible as Holy Ghost. Indeed, the Spirit has been described as amorphous, faceless, shadowy, anonymous, and so forth.³ It also gets more confusing when the same word spirit can refer either to the Spirit of God, Holy Spirit, human spirit, or even to other spirits. All such qualifications, no doubt, point to something about the elusiveness and dynamism of the reality that the term spirit conveys. Not too infrequently, the notion of spirit has played into the hierarchized dualism that plagues Western theological and philosophical thought, implying a dichotomy and hierarchy between soul/body, spirit/matter, mental/physical, human/nature, holy/profane, male/female, and so on. Peter Hodgson is right in his judgment that, more often than not, the “hierarchy reflects a suspicion and fear of the suppressed poles: nature, the body, the feminine.”⁴

These suppressed poles are often viewed to be outside the operation of the Spirit understood as Holy. In a mistaken impression, the Spirit understood as Holy appears to be opposed to the profane and the secular, to nature, body, and the feminine. That this type of mentality has spun a spirituality of hostility—Gnostic and Neo-Platonist in

³ Johnson, *She Who Is*, 130-1.

⁴ Peter C. Hodgson, *Winds of the Spirit: A Constructive Christian Theology* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 276.

character—toward the body and remoteness from nature and the world, and reinforcing misogynist bias, is rather evident in the history of Western Catholic spirituality and theology. At any rate, notwithstanding the elusive character of the Spirit, biblical texts consistently figure the relational dynamism of the Spirit. Such relationality is concretized, for instance, in the Spirit's creative and sustaining activity; the Spirit is: "[the] life-form who animates and sustains the natural world. The Spirit makes alive the natural systems on which all life depends."⁵ As a matter of fact, a cluster of biblical imageries that accrue around the Spirit are all corporeal and vital for life. Be it breath, wind, water, fire, or even the avian one (dove), each of these is vital for sustaining life and for living as we shall see shortly.

Therefore, any attempt to make the Spirit antithetical to body, matter, nature, or the secular is wrongly headed. Any such alternative would be false, narrow, and fails to square with reality which appears as more holistic but dynamically interconnected. The Spirit always seeks and rests on bodies; the Spirit always mediates God's presence in and to the world in embodied fashion. The relational dynamism of the Spirit, therefore, requires a more radical affirmation of the Spirit as not simply ethereal, immaterial, ghostly, vacant, but the very "Spirit of Life," the "Divine Energy of Life" itself, and indeed, the immanence of God in the whole world and in all things.⁶ This very affirmation can only be eliminated from view to the detriment of the Christian faith and theology. Elizabeth Johnson rightly accedes that this affirmation points "to the gracious, furious mystery of God engaged in a dialectic of presence and absence throughout the

⁵ See Mark I. Wallace et al., "Spirit," in *Constructive Theology: A Contemporary Approach to Classical Themes*, ed. Serene Jones and Paul Lakeland (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 244.

⁶ See *Ibid.*, 243.

world, creating, indwelling, sustaining, resisting, recreating, challenging, guiding, liberating, completing.”⁷ All of these seemingly disparate activities of the Spirit, Johnson affirms, “are in reality but aspects of the one engagement, the one economy of God with the world.”⁸ Johnson’s fine insight here is a very significant one. There is only one economy of God with the world and not two or three as the case may be. The one economy spans from creation through redemption to consummation. Creation and redemption do not constitute two separate economies. God creates in order to save. There may not be such a thing as world history separate from a salvation history. For salvation history entails the salvation of this whole created world. Redemption embraces not only humanity but the entire cosmos since the Redeemer is at the same time the Creator and reconciler of all things.⁹ To look at Christ who became incarnate and was resurrected in the power of the Spirit is to see that redemption embraces all the dimensions of existence. For in Christ all things hold together and through him (and his redemptive act), God reconciles to himself all things, things in heaven and things on earth (see Col 1:16-20; Eph 1:3-4). No aspect of reality is left out. Therefore, redemption enfolds all the dimensions of being such that it includes not only liberation from the burdens of guilt through forgiveness of sins and engendering hope for eternal life, but also from the aftermath of sins manifested in sinister economic, political, and socio-cultural structures that repress, alienate, and exploit men and women in history. All these aspects belong together and to the one and the same history of God’s engagement with the whole

⁷ Johnson, *She Who Is*, 133.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ See Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 113.

world.¹⁰ It is the relational Spirit who is the agent of this holism. The elusiveness and relational dynamism of the Spirit engenders the fruitful correlation between God's transcendence and God's continuous coming into communion with all of reality. This correlation is nowhere more evident than as it is captured in metaphorical language. Having said this, let us now examine the significance of the use of metaphors in speaking about the Spirit.

3.2.2 Metaphors/Symbols of the Spirit

In human speech, metaphors and/or symbols are used frequently to express meanings in a way that concepts are incapable of doing. The use of metaphor entails the transfer and application of a descriptive term or name or phrase to a person, an object, or action to which it is imaginatively and symbolically (that is, really) but not literally applicable. Symbols are imageries that "point beyond themselves and evoke awareness of a dimension of human existence [and experience] that cannot be captured in nonsymbolic expressions."¹¹ The revelation or the coming of God to humans is a unique experience of interpersonal relationship that human concepts cannot capture adequately. The reason is simple. God is a mystery and God is love. In his loving self-gift and communication to humans God reveals God's self as transcendent-immanent, as absent-present. God, albeit, is the mysteriously wholly other and yet, God's self revealing is always mediated in and through particular concrete human experiences, situations, and persons. Symbol as a particular structure of mediation makes real and present that which is signified without

¹⁰ See Ibid., 112.

¹¹ Leo D. Lefebure, *Revelation, the Religions, and Violence* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2000), 2.

absolute identification. Symbols function like sacraments. Indeed, sacraments are symbols or even icons. Religious symbols as rituals function to bridge and thus overcome the distance between the transcendent mystery (vertical dimension) and to draw the past (memory) into the present with an eye toward the future (horizontal dimension). In this symbolic or sacramental operationalism, the power of human imagination (graced, of course) creates an equilibrium of intimacy by converging both the vertical and horizontal axes into a continuum that is real and efficacious *hic et nunc*.¹²

In relation to speech about the Spirit, the use of metaphors or symbols is most *ad rem*. In talking about the first Person of the Trinity, we are helped by such a familiar concept as “Father.” With respect to the second Person, the idea of “Son” coupled with his incarnation and hence his humanity, help matters. But with regard to the Spirit, we encounter some difficulty because even the term “Holy Spirit” is not a proper noun. Besides, the elusiveness of the Spirit makes it all the more difficult to grapple with the mystery that is the Spirit. It is against this back-drop that we appreciate the series of metaphorical ways in which the Old (or rather First) and New (or Second) Testaments (hereafter, OT and NT) describe the operation and personhood of the Spirit. Among others, we shall focus on the following metaphors: wind or breath, water or rain, fire or light, oil or anointing, and dove. A crucial point worth noting is that all these metaphors are natural and material elements, and therefore, corporeal rather than ethereal. This unmistakably underscores the point that the Spirit is not antithetical to corporeality, rather she intercompenetrates and suffuses it with life. Taking these metaphors one after the

¹² See George S. Worgul, Jr., *From Magic to Metaphor: A Validation of the Christian Sacraments* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), esp. chap. 5.

other, we shall see how they capture for us the *proprium* and role of the Spirit.

Wind or Breath: In the OT, experiences of God are often presented metaphorically as the movement or rushing of the wind. Indeed, wind or breath is known as *rûah*. In a later section, we shall explore a detailed understanding of *rûah* in the OT, but for the moment, suffice it to say that *rûah* is the principle of life that births creation, empowers individuals for specific tasks especially liberative ventures, and as breath, gives life to humans and all living creatures. Wind is neither static nor rigid. Rather it is always in motion, fluid, dynamic, unpredictable, uncontrollable, irrepressible, and all-pervasive. We can then understand why Jesus in referring to the operation of the Spirit says to Nicodemus: “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going” (Jn 3:8). Gregory Nazianzen expands this saying of Jesus by rightly acceding that the Spirit not only blows where He wills but also on whom He wills, and to what extent He wills.¹³ This is a very interesting metaphor. The Spirit that blows everywhere is pervasively present in the entire creation so that no one or group can monopolize, completely contain, or domesticate the Spirit. The wind that is ceaselessly surging symbolizes the insurgent Spirit who resists all forms of rigid formalization and routinization. Because the wind is constantly blowing and in motion, it makes stagnant or foul air become fresh and full of vitality. It refreshes and purifies, bringing about newness and new possibilities. Similarly, the ever blowing and new winds of the Spirit move over lives that are contested, degraded, or even moribund, groaning in them as in labor pain (see Rom 8:18-27). Since labor pains usually yield new birth and new life, the Spirit’s groan augurs radical novelty, new possibilities, new

¹³ Gregory Nazianzen, *XLI Oration*, On Pentecost, § V.

creation, new beginnings, and a non-deceptive hope that shatters stagnation and moribundity. It yields and sustains life. For a world without air will degenerate into lifelessness. Wind is also a source of energy and power. No wonder *rûah* refers to the power of God to accomplish and actualize divine projects. When the powerful effusion of the great wind came upon the disciples on Pentecost, they were so possessed and filled with power and courage that they broke loose from their fears and lethargy and set “on the move towards unsuspected new things”¹⁴ that they would not otherwise do. The power and energy of the Spirit empowers and mobilizes the agency of the degraded and oppressed to resist and break the stranglehold of tyranny. Sometimes too, the irresistible power of a very strong wind is destructive of whatever stands in its way. This is about the Spirit as life-giver as well as the insurgent, transgressive, and resistant Spirit against all controls of empire and all anti-life forces.

Water or Rain: In a number of instances in the Bible water is used as an apt metaphor for the Spirit. As Jesus once put it, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him. By this he meant the Spirit....” (Jn 7:37-39; cf 4:10). The symbol of water tells us a great deal about the Holy Spirit. Water is necessary for the preservation of life. A human being is said to compose of about sixty percent water. Hence, any acute dehydration can lead to instant death. Other animals and plants need water to stay alive. Without water or rain, the earth will neither be fruitful nor sustain any kind of life. In the days of Elijah, for instance, when it did not rain for three and half years, all vegetation died until Elijah prayed for it to rain again (see 1 Kgs 17:1; 18:41-45; cf Jas 5:17-18).

¹⁴ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 278.

Analogously, it is to say that the Holy Spirit is indispensable to the preservation and sustenance of life. Water is equally necessary for cleansing our bodies and filthiness. According to Gustavo Gutiérrez, “water also continually purifies us and smoothes away any wrinkles in manner of being Christians, at the same time supplying the vital element needed for making new ground fruitful.”¹⁵ When the Spirit is poured out upon us, she births us anew, washes guilt away, refreshes and renews us (see Jn 3:5). And as Jesus said to the Samaritan woman about the life-giving water which he shall give, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give will become in him a spring of living water welling up to eternal life” (Jn 4:14). That is to say, when human beings receive the Spirit, she becomes in them a life-giving wellspring from which others are supposed to drink. Again, the immensity of water points to its power to drown or erode whatever tries to be an obstacle on its path. We see the destructive power of water at work in the Flood during Noah’s days (Gen 7) as well as the drowning of Pharaoh’s army in the Red Sea (Ex 14:28). Water is one of the greatest solvents and it can, with time, erode even the strongest rock or stone on its path. It is also a source of power and energy. This is still about the life-giving and saving but also resistant Spirit.

Fire or Light: Another popular metaphor of the Holy Spirit is fire. In the OT, most theophanies of God occurred amidst fire. Fire in relation to God in the OT always signified the presence of God. But since it is in and through the Spirit that God is present, fire is another apt imagery for the Spirit. John the Baptist, when contrasting his own

¹⁵ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *We Drink From Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People*, 20th Anniv. d., trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books: 2003), 5.

baptism with that to be administered by Jesus, spoke about Jesus as the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (Matt 3:11; Lk 3:16). The usage of the fire imagery here by John the Baptist appears to follow from the prophecy of Malachi 3:2-3, about the purificatory messianic fire that will refurbish and revamp everything, and foreshadowing the new creation. Again, during the Pentecost event, amidst a rushing mighty wind that filled the house where the disciples were hiding for fear of the Jews, “they saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them” (Acts 2:2, 3). Here, it is a source of power and enablement. Fire is indispensable for human life and survival. It provides warmth and heat without which humans cannot survive certain cold temperatures. Its combustive ability provides the energy needed for machine power of different sorts. Heat energy can be converted to light energy and to other several uses. Light dispels darkness. The heat and light from the sun are needed by plants for photosynthesis and by us for natural vitamin D. Without plants, animals and humans will lack food for sustenance. Moreover, fire consumes and burns. The burning capacity of fire can be purificatory or destructive depending on the circumstance. The Spirit who indwells us consumes sin in us. The fire of the Spirit is often called the fire or flame of love according to the language of St. John of the Cross. Just as the disciples were lighted up when the Spirit descended upon them at Pentecost and in place of fear, they became emboldened and fired up with enthusiasm to witness to Christ, so too when the Spirit gets hold of our hearts, she fills us with the fiery love for the Lord and with zeal for the proclamation of the Gospel in word and deed. The consuming fire of the Spirit also speaks to the resistance of the Spirit to whatever tries to impede her movement.

Oil or Anointing: The Spirit in both the Old and New Testaments is considerably

associated with or rather symbolized by oil. The metaphor of oil has a lot to tell us about the Spirit. As we shall see below, those who are assigned a specific task to carry out by God are always empowered implicitly or explicitly by the Spirit of God. Anointed places and persons become holy and by that very act, are set apart for God's purposes. For instance, God commanded Moses to consecrate the tabernacle of the congregation, the ark of the testimony, the altar, and so on, by anointing them with oil (see Ex 30:25-29). Moses also consecrated Aaron and his sons by anointing them and thus setting them apart for the priestly office (see Ex 30:30). Others include David, anointed by Samuel for the kingly and prophetic office (see 1 Sam 16:13). Most of the prophets received their prophetic calling when Yahweh's *rûah* came upon them and anointed them with power and utterance. At baptism when we are reborn by the Spirit, we are anointed and empowered to become priests, prophets, and kings (see 1 Pet 2:9). Again, it was oil that sustained the light of the seven-branched candlestick (the Minora) in the tabernacle of God. The tabernacle light that shined continually in the holy place symbolized the constant presence of God amidst the people. Irenaeus comments that it is the Spirit which gives light; he interprets the seven-branched candlestick which Moses received according to the heavenly pattern as the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit which rested on the Son of God in his coming as man.¹⁶ Indeed, identifying the Spirit with anointing, Irenaeus pointedly avers: "The oil of anointing is the Spirit, wherewith He (the Son of God) has been anointed."¹⁷ When we are anointed by the Spirit, we also receive the sevenfold gifts of the Spirit and become light which requires the unceasing supply of the oil that is also

¹⁶ See Irenaeus, *The Demonstration of Apostolic Preaching*, 9 (hereafter, Dem.).

¹⁷ Ibid., 47

the Spirit if we must continue burning brightly in the world to radiate God's presence and love. Furthermore, oil serves as a lubricant to prevent wear and tear resulting from friction between rubbing parts. In the same way, the relational Spirit, the Spirit of communion lubricates the frictions, conflicts, dangers, risks, ambiguities that tend to threaten human relationships emanating from the encounter of differences. The anointing which abides with us is even personified as the teacher of truth and wisdom (see 1 Jn 2:20, 27). Oil is also necessary for the preservation of life not only as a necessary ingredient for our nutritional needs but also for healing and soothing the sick. All this symbolize the work of the Spirit as life-giver and preserver, as enabler and the principle of communion.

Dove: This avian symbol is used to describe the Holy Spirit more precisely during the baptism of Jesus in River Jordan. Accordingly, John the Baptist declaring that Jesus was the Christ gave this testimony: 'I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him'" (Jn 1:32). St. Irenaeus speaks about the Spirit of God resting on Christ as a mingling with his flesh.¹⁸ The dove is associated with the symbol of peace and somewhat with the symbol of life. When the deluge receded during Noah's days, he released a dove from the ark to ascertain if the waters had abated and if peace and life had returned to the earth. The dove came back to Noah in the evening carrying a fresh olive branch in her beak indicating that peace had returned and that the earth was once more habitable (see Gen 8:8-9, 10-11). This act of the dove is a ground of hope for a better and more peaceful as well as the possibility of an alternative world. Such a hope does not disappoint as God promises not to destroy the world again by flood. This hope for a

¹⁸ Ibid., 41.

world that has been reconciled and now at peace with God through Christ, is a hope that does not disappoint “because the Holy Spirit has been given to us, pouring into our hearts the love of God” (Rom 5:1, 6). The dove is also known as a pure and harmless creature as well as a symbol of meekness and humility.¹⁹ This symbol interpellates our mentality in a world where living like cat and dog often due to human hubris and corporate greed is the vogue. In a fragmented world torn apart by endless violence, domination, and oppression, the Spirit symbolized by the dove is a reminder that an alternative world where justice, peace, love, and harmony reign is possible. The avian connection to hovering and birthing of creation will be explored in a subsequent section.

It should now become obvious from the elaboration of these symbols/metaphors of the Holy Spirit that the Spirit does not shy away from matter or body, and therefore, from difference since matter is the principle of differentiation and individuation. Rather the Spirit seeks and rests on bodies always. The Spirit animates and endues bodies with life and power. In the circumstance where the life of the body is threatened, the Spirit recreates, revivifies, liberates, renews, and resists such anti-life forces.

At this juncture we shall take a closer look at what it might mean to affirm that the Spirit is the Lord and the Giver of Life. Of course, as already indicated, this affirmation was part of the expansion during the Council of Constantinople (381) of the third article of the Nicene Creed (325). The Council of Nicaea had articulated and defended the faith of the Church in the face of Arianism which had denied the full divinity of Christ. As opposed to the “pneumatomachoi” (opponents or fighters of the

¹⁹ See David Yonggi Cho, *The Holy Spirit, My Senior Partner: Understanding the Holy Spirit and His Gifts* (Umuahia, Nigeria: Christian Crusaders Quality Press, 2002), 59.

Spirit who claimed that the Spirit was a creature), the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople affirmed the divinity of the Spirit as well as identified the Spirit with the role of God as Creator and Giver of life. In order to properly elucidate and reinterpret this affirmation of the Spirit as the Lord and Giver of life and its implications for Christian life and practice today, I will be particularly dependent on the work of Moltmann, especially *The Spirit of Life*.

3.2.3 The Spirit as the Lord and the Giver of Life: Explication

The third article of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed professes the Spirit as *dominum et vivificantem* – the Lord and Giver of Life. In the Hebrew Bible, these two metaphors implicate each other. The name “Lord” was never revealed to the patriarchs as God himself acknowledged: “God also said to Moses, ‘I am the LORD.’ I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them” (Ex 6:2-3). The name was revealed for the first time to Moses in the burning bush when God initiated the process of the liberation of Israel from Egyptian slavery. The divine name that God revealed to Moses which he (Moses) in turn was to convey to the people of Israel to whom God sent him is, “I am who am.” God, the ‘I am’ further said to Moses to tell the Israelites that “Yahweh” the God-*of* their ancestors, the God-*of* Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had sent him to them and that this would be God’s name forever and for all generations (See Ex 3: 14-15). Yahweh is the glorious and awesome name of the God of Israel which the people were required to fear and revere (See Deut 28: 58). The Septuagint translates the revealed divine name as “*ho On eimi ho On*” and Yahweh as “*Kurios*.” Yahweh, therefore, refers to God who is Being in an absolute sense and who is the Unoriginate source or origin of all created existences.

God is and God causes to exist. The name Yahweh as *Kurios* – Lord, thus, takes on significance against the backdrop of the experience of liberation and the new life which God would work out on behalf of Israel. Hence for Israel, the unique experience of God was the experience of God’s lordship as her liberator (see Ex 14:30-31).²⁰ What becomes obvious is that God reveals His presence in history always as a relational God; as the God-*of*, the God-*for*. He is the God-*of*-the-Patriarchs and in the Exodus event he becomes the God-*of*-a-people: “I will be your God and you shall be my people.” Thus particularly relational, God reveals himself as a God-*of*, who wants to be in relation to a people especially under the condition of oppression (both historical and spiritual). If this is the case, then it is at least plausible to argue that this is a “vision” of God; it is the way God wants to be seen or viewed. It is as a relational God, a God-*of*, that He listens and hears the cry of the people in order to liberate them (that is, as the God-*for*) and make them his people. Therefore, God’s very relational being and presence—as revealed and typified by the divine name ‘Yahweh’—signifies God’s solicitude for the people in their concrete experience of His liberating action on their behalf from oppression and suffering in an unjust socio-cultural and religious situation.

Israel experienced God as Lord primarily within the context of liberation. It is in this sense that Moltmann underscores the idea of freedom as that which lies behind the name Lord.²¹ The experience of God as Lord and the experience of true freedom thus belong together. So understood, the name Lord does not have any of the meanings that have usually been associated with it in the course of history to express master – subject

²⁰ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 99.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 270.

relationship. In that hierarchical understanding, the one lords it over the other; the one represses and subjugates the other; the one is free but the other is not. The metaphor, Lord, has too often been construed to entail imposition or domination requiring peremptory submission and loyalty. This may not be unconnected with the Latin connotation of the term Lord as “*Dominus*.” The word “domination” which could mean to lord it over, to imperiously tyrannize, or to be domineering and autocratic, derives from the Latin *dominus*. But God’s lordship is the power for compassion that liberates rather than enslaves or dominates, the power that gives new life and the hope of a brighter future rather than diminishes life and institutes the night. As Moltmann rightly puts it, “the name ‘Lord’ has nothing to do with enslavement. Its context is liberation. This can only be explained from the first commandment: it is the Exodus experience which is Israel’s revelation of God.”²² Israel indeed first experienced God as a liberator before conceiving Him as a Creator. So the God who revealed himself as relational God in the context of liberation from oppression and bondage and gave them free life, must have created them in the first place in order to save them. Hence, the ‘I am,’ the God who is and who creates what is, is truly the ‘Lord’ because of His capacity, *inter alia*, to intervene and act in history, and to take as well an oppressed people’s side in order to save and liberate them.

What emerges from the foregoing is clearly a picture of God whose predilection is for the weak and oppressed. The entire setting for the revelation of the divine name to Moses speaks of compassion: “I have seen the affliction of my people in Egypt and have heard their cry of complaint against their slave drivers, so I know well what they are

²² Ibid., 271.

suffering. I have come down to rescue them” (Ex 3:7-8). God’s lordship is mobilized when God ‘sees the affliction’ and ‘hears the groaning’ of the oppressed and dominated of human history, God ‘remembers’²³ his covenant with humanity and takes the initiative to work out their liberation from the frigid clutches of death-dealing forces. Small wonder the prophetic tradition, as we shall see in a later section, presents God as the defender of the oppressed (for His reign is good news), unmasking sin, its oppressive evils, and injustice as well as denouncing the perpetrators (for His reign is not only critical of the bad and unjust religious and socio-historical present, but is also grace in order to transform society). God as Lord is the God of freedom and life in the midst of yoke and death (See Ex 6: 6-8).

A pertinent point that needs to be stressed is that this compassionate act of God is completely gracious and gratuitous. The coming of God in history is always purely out of His gratuitous love. God’s gratuitous love and predilection for the downtrodden and exploited is a prophetic praxis. And it is within this theocentric matrix that every commitment to and solidarity of the weak and oppressed of the world is grounded since such divine gratuitousness is not opposed to human struggle and striving as a loving human response to it. Indeed, the gratuitous gift of liberation and justice which God accomplished on behalf of Israel became the condition of possibility for the task of liberating praxis and struggle on behalf of the vulnerable and the poor (the strangers, the *anawin* – widows, orphans, slaves, and all those who live under the crushing weight of a burden) with which Israel was charged. Precisely because they have all received justice from the Lord, justice is expected of every Israelite (See Ex 22:21; Deut 24:14; Lev

²³ See Ex 2: 23-25; 6: 5; see also Lk 2: 52-55.

19:1ff). The relational God will keep being the God-of-Israel and Israel his people as long as, among other things, they keep defending the weak and the poor among them.

Therefore, these two dimensions of liberation, the unmerited love of God as grace in history and the loving human response as a task, are, albeit, distinct but must not be separated. Without circumlocution, John sums up this dynamic in his Epistle: “Since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another” (1 Jn 4:11).

What remains now to be articulated is the connection between the Spirit and Lord. According to Moltmann, “when the Spirit is given the name Lord, Christian experience of the Spirit is being set within Israel’s history with Yahweh.”²⁴ That is to say, the lordship of the Spirit is understood in Christian experience against the backdrop of the idea of liberation and the giving of life. We find this idea clearly expressed in Pauline theology where St. Paul says: “The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor 3: 17). Paul, of course, has in mind the Spirit of the risen Christ poured out to indwell believers, and who by so doing, frees “them from the compulsion of sin and the power of death because it now already mediates to them eternal and imperishable life,”²⁵ writes Moltmann. Indeed, “the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor 3: 6), says Paul. And Jesus himself affirms this: “It is the Spirit that gives life” (Jn 6: 63). It is to be noted, however, that this very ascription of lordship is also true of Christ as was confessed of him by the early church which understood him as sharing in the lordship of God. Hence one of the earliest Christian creeds says: “If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be

²⁴ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 271.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 270.

saved” (Rom 10: 9-10).²⁶ Indeed, Paul describes the risen Christ, the new Adam, as “a life-giving spirit” (I Cor 15: 45).²⁷ For as the first-fruits from the dead, he becomes our savior to liberate us from the slavery of sin to freedom and from the hopelessness of death to eternal life.

The naming of the Spirit as the Lord and giver of life is thus set within the compass of a messianic Exodus experience. Just as Israel’s experience of God as Yahweh took form in the context of the Exodus experience of liberation from bondage and impoverished life to freedom and new life, so is the Christian calling of the Spirit as Lord set within the leitmotif of a new Exodus liberation experience. In accordance with Moltmann, “the end-time outpouring of the Spirit at ‘Pentecost’ is understood as a messianic Exodus experience.”²⁸ In this Christian messianic understanding of the Exodus experience, what seems to have taken place is the assimilation of the role of Israel’s Lord into the Holy Spirit since as Moltmann notes, “‘the Old Testament’ is the testimony of the history of the Spirit for the future of the kingdom of God,”²⁹ and which kingdom, for Christians, is already present *hic et nunc*.

New life within the matrix of that kingdom, according to the Christian dispensation, requires new birth. Hence for John the evangelist, unless one is born again or born anew of water and the Holy Spirit, one cannot enter the kingdom of God (see Jn

²⁶ For a detailed treatment of how Jesus came to be included in the lordship of God in earliest Christianity, see Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2003).

²⁷ See also vv. 17-22.

²⁸ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 271.

²⁹ Ibid.

3: 3-6). Moreover, for John, the Spirit is the Paraclete, the Comforter, who not only creates the new life in Christ but also nurtures it and defends it just as an attorney defends a client standing trial.³⁰ It therefore becomes clear that the rebirth to life which the Spirit engenders is redolent with the Exodus leitmotif. It is about liberation from slavery to sin and from the evil manifestations of sin, and hence deliverance from death and freedom to new life.

After the departure of Israel from Egypt at God's initiative, and while God dwelt in their midst all through the journey in the wilderness, the people were nevertheless, to work out their destiny in collaboration with God their liberator. Face to face with the difficulties that accompany the walk to freedom, Israel was frequently tempted to return to Egypt, that symbolic place of oppression, exploitation, and death. Similarly, even after the rebirth to new life by the Spirit, sin remains a temptation for us. It is in the light of this tendency that Paul reproaches the Galatian Christians: "Formerly, you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?" (Gal 4:8-9). In his solicitude for the Galatians, Paul exhorts them to hold unto the freedom Christ won for them through the Spirit who gave them new birth and not to submit themselves again to the yoke of slavery. Hence, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free" (Gal 5:1). Nothing could be further from the truth than to underline that the idea of freedom and the new life wrought by the Spirit in the believer was of great importance to Paul that he could not emphasize them enough. He goes further to say in his epistle to the Romans

³⁰ For a keen appreciation of the Spirit as Paraclete and Comforter, see Chapter. 1. Sec. 1.5.2, above.

that through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life has set us free from the law of sin and death (see Rom 8:2). Paul, of course, uses the word ‘law’ in Romans in different ways to refer to: God’s law (2:17-20; 9:31; 10:3-5); the Pentateuch (3:21b); the OT as a whole (3:19); a principle (3:27); a controlling power (8:2). But Paul uses the law of the Spirit of life here to mean the controlling power of the Holy Spirit who is life giving as opposed to the controlling power of sin which ultimately produces death.³¹

From what has been elaborated, it is obvious that in the experience of the Spirit as Lord, two key elements emerge: life and freedom. How these two elements correlate is beautifully given expression by Moltmann: “Freedom without new life is empty. Life without freedom is dead.”³² Those who are called to freedom and new life in Christ are enjoined to eagerly await by faith through the Spirit, the righteousness for which we hope. During this time of eschatological waiting, what matters according to Paul is, “faith working through love” (Gal 5:6). During this time, those called to be free and led by the Spirit of life are required to use their freedom to serve God and one another in love (see Gal 5:13). It is not a time for indulgence. Faith working through love is a “vision,” a way of being Christian, and a commitment to followership of Christ. To say that we have been reborn to new life and freedom by the Spirit supposes that we are “now living in depth our condition as disciples of him who said in so many words that he is the Way.”³³ Love is the way of living out in action our faith in Christ in the eschatological in-between. But

³¹ See commentary in The NIV Study Bible.

³² Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 271.

³³ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 15th Anniv. ed., ed. and trans. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2005), xxxii. See also Jn 14: 6.

this love, like the gratuitous love of God expressed in His liberative action is always a preferential and prophetic predilection for the weak and those stripped of their humanity by the forces of sin and death. Christian praxis of love is thus both a gift and a task to work toward God's reign of shalom, establishing justice and peace. All those who have experienced the freedom and new life the Spirit offers have been swept into the economy of divine dance of love to propagate it; to participate in the Spirit's movement of redemption. This is done, first of all, through overcoming sins in one's own personal life and then via a struggle against all inhuman situations of injustice, misery, impoverishment, and exploitation wherever they are at work, thereby contributing to bringing about a just society and signaling God's kingdom "which is certainly as yet only on the way to its fulfillment."³⁴ Indeed, in the words of Moltmann:

living freedom and free can endure only in justice and righteousness. In justice, human freedom ministers to life – the life shared by all living beings. In justice, human life struggles for the freedom of everything that lives, and resists oppression. So justice brings the two key factors freedom and life down to a common denominator.... Only justice puts life to rights, and defines the content of liberty through 'the covenant of life.' It is only in justice that life can endure.³⁵

Moltmann here makes a salient move toward a more holistic pneumatological vision. The life and freedom engendered by the Spirit are not merely limited to an individual's soul or to the life of the church alone. Rather Moltmann has in mind the universal activity of the Spirit in gracing the whole creation with life and space for freedom. Thus human freedom and life can only flourish in an atmosphere of justice. Genuine freedom finds its fullness in its orientation toward God, others, and nature—that is, in taking responsibility

³⁴ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 112.

³⁵ Ibid., 271-2.

for justice. This entails, among other things, openness to others, mutual respect and reciprocal acceptance of others for who they are, community in solidarity, restoration of rights and dignity to the deprived, conversion of the unjust, communion and communication of life, as well as openness to creativity and possibilities of newness. Unfortunately, in contemporary so-called secular rhetoric of liberty or freedom, this aspect of responsibility or obligation has been occluded, reducing freedom to merely issues of individualistic rights and entitlements.³⁶ When the creative and prophetic Spirit of life and freedom possesses us, then justice and lasting peace will reign. We shall now look at the relationship between the Creator Spirit of life and the issue of embodiment.

3.2.4 The Spirit the Giver of Life and the Question of Embodiment

In the preceding section, it is made clear that Israel experienced God as Yahweh or Lord in the context of the Exodus event of liberation. Thus God was first experienced as a Liberator and by extrapolation backward, was then conceived as a Creator. In liberating Israel from slavery and oppression, God graciously intends the good of Israel, giving it freedom and new life, and for it to flourish in the Promised Land. Similarly, in creating the whole world, God intends the good of all creatures, giving them life (particularly human beings), sustaining them, and providing for their flourishing. The point thus made is that the world with its goodness is neither the product of nor is it ruled by “a pantheon of viciously warring gods—as in many of the mythic tales of the ancient Near East—but by the One who is alone God, the LORD worshipped by Israel as

³⁶ See Ian A. McFarland et al., ed., “Human Being,” in *Constructive Theology: A Contemporary Approach to Classical Themes*, ed. Serene Jones and Paul Lakeland (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 77.

Redeemer and Creator.”³⁷ God is thus ‘Lord’ over all, not in a tyrannical sense as was the case with the vicious gods, but as a gracious Creator God “who intends to bring all of creation to its proper end: the ‘rest’ of the Sabbath day.”³⁸ As part of the essence of the Sabbath rest, God intends humans and creation to be free from servitude and exploitation.

Having offered this brief preliminary nexus between Israel’s experience of the Liberator God as the Creator God, we shall now look at the doctrine of creation and life-giving from a pneumatological vantage point. It is worth noting that between the Greek *pneuma*, the Latin *spiritus*, the Germanic *Geist*, and the English spirit, if there is one thing that is common to them all, it is that they have always been construed in Western conceptual scheme as anti-corporeal, immaterial, and hence antithetical to matter and body. Moltmann calls for a recourse to the Hebrew *rûah* which does not permit the Western cleavage between nature, body, and spirit, if we must come to a more holistic appreciation of the Spirit’s activity in creation.³⁹

3.2.5 The Nature of the Spirit as Rûah

A return to the primordial understanding of the nature and richness of the Hebrew word *rûah* in talking about the Spirit is important and will meaningfully contribute to the way we understand the nature of the world. Whereas *rûah* appears about 380 times, the phrase *rûah Yahweh* occurs in about 27 passages in the Old Testament.⁴⁰ The Hebrew

³⁷ D. Lyle Dabney, “The Nature of the Spirit: Creation as a Premonition of God,” in *The Work of the Spirit: Pneumatology and Pentecostalism*, ed. Michael Welker (Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2006), 77.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ See Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 41.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 40.

rûah with a polysemic semantic range connotes something of the wind, storm, tempest, air, breath, energy, and power; it is what is moving or in motion, fluid, event-like, vital, living, active, rational, and conscious. *Rûah* is not static (as in the stasis of substance ontology), not rigid or calcified. Rather, it is dynamic. When applied to God as Yahweh's *rûah*, the word refers to the creative, empowering, and life-giving power of God and even sometimes to God's killing wrath.⁴¹ It refers to the overarching divine presence in creation, history, and in humans. *Rûah* at times also refers to its parallel, *nephesh*—the soul—to mean the principle of life or vitality, the individual human consciousness. From the outset, we have to remember that in the OT the Spirit had not yet acquired a distinct hypostasis. However, throughout the OT both impersonal and personal attributes are interchangeably predicated of *rûah* such as the Spirit speaking through the prophets. Even in the few instances where reference to 'Holy Spirit' occurs, and, of course, only at a relatively late period in the OT (see Ps 51: 13; Isa 63: 10, 11ff; Wis 1: 5; 9: 17),⁴² it does not refer to the Spirit as a distinct hypostasis.

⁴¹ Ibid., 41.

⁴² See Ibid., 47. Again, John R. Levison provides a larger context for an understanding of the use of the phrase 'Holy Spirit' in those OT references. Accordingly, "In Psalm 51, the Holy Spirit is that which vivifies individual human beings." Hence the Psalmist begs the Lord not to cast him away from His presence nor take His Holy Spirit away from him. On the contrary, in Isaiah 63: 7-14, "the Holy Spirit is similar to the angel of Exodus 23 which guided Israel through the wilderness." Continuing, Levison points out that the "prophet's recollection that Israel 'rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit,' in a context permeated by exodus and wilderness imagery, is reminiscent of the command that Israel 'not rebel against' the angel sent to guard Israel on its wilderness sojourn (Ex 23: 20-23)." Equally, the reference that "'the spirit of the LORD gave them rest' (Isa 63: 14) reminisces Exodus 33: 14, according to which God's presence gave Israel rest. Levison, therefore, concludes that "In the Hebrew Bible...the designation, holy spirit, refers both to the vivifying power of individual human beings and the angelic presence which led the community of Israel through the wilderness." See his paper, "The Pluriform Foundation of Christian Pneumatology," in *Advents of the Spirit: An Introduction to the Current Study of Pneumatology*, ed. Bradford E. Hinze and D. Lyle Dabney (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 2001), 67.

3.2.6 The Work of Rûah as Creator Spirit

In the priestly account of the creation narrative in Genesis 1:2 the priestly redactor inserted the action of *rûah Elohim* over the waters of the sea in the Exodus context into the primeval chaos and waters in the deep at the beginning of creation. The same priestly redactor recollects in the Song of Moses: “At a breath (*rûah*) of your anger the waters piled up, the flowing waters stood like a mound, the flood waters congealed in the midst of the sea.... When your wind (*rûah*) blew, the sea covered them; like lead they sank in the mighty waters” (Ex 15: 8, 10).

Moreover, in the narrative of creation in Genesis 1: 2 the priestly author’s genius lies in his adeptness in transposing creation as a complex reality emerging from *rûah Elohim*’s action of moving upon or brooding over the primeval watery chaos (*tohu vabohu*). He writes: “Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters” (NIV). According to (KJV), “the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters;” (RSV), “the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters;” whereas (NAB) says, “A mighty wind swept over the surface of the waters;” and (NRSV), “a wind from God swept over the face of the waters (*mayim*).” Now, two facts emerge from the quotation above: the first is that *rûah* sometimes translates as wind and in some other cases as spirit. The second is that the Hebrew phrase *měrahepeth‘al* which literally means “flap,” “shake,” or “flutter” translates in the expression *rûah Elohim...měrahepeth‘al* as “the spirit of God hovering over or brooding over....” Again, it also translates as “the wind of God...swept over....” Interestingly, this word *měrahepeth* is used only once elsewhere throughout the entire Bible, that is, in Deuteronomy 32: 11 where the NAB renders it thus: “As an eagle

incites its nestlings forth by hovering (*yěrahēp*) over its brood...” As used here the word retains some of the connotations of the Syriac *rahep* which literally means “to brood,” “incubate,” “shake,” or “protect.” It refers to the action of moving oneself gently, “to fly to and fro, to keep nest eggs warm, to brood.” The activity is thus similar to that of a bird brooding over its young.⁴³ Whereas on the one hand, the use of the notion of “wind” to denote the Spirit in relation to creation retains something of the element of the unpredictability, the uncontrollability, the mysterious and dynamic nature of the Spirit, the avian imagery on the other hand, is a better fit with the idea of hovering and brooding over, and suggests more of a caring, life-giving activity of a living reality such as the Spirit of Elohim than that of wind.⁴⁴ Thus, with the action of brooding over by *rûah Elohim*, the chaos becomes “promise,” culminating with the birthing or bringing forth of creation from chaos.⁴⁵ The Spirit thus brings possibilities and hope into reality,⁴⁶ leading

⁴³ See Amos Yong, “Ruach, the Primordial Chaos, and the Breath of Life: Emergence Theory and the Creation Narratives in Pneumatological Perspective,” in *The Work of the Spirit*, 191. Amos depended on L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. and ed. M. E. J. Richardson, 2 vols. (Leiden, Boston, and Koln: Brill, 2001), 2: 1219-20; see also George T. Montague, “The Fire in the Word: Holy Spirit in Scripture,” in *Advents of the Spirit*, 38-9; he depended on F. Zorell, *Lexicon Hebraicum et Aramaicum* (Rome: PBI. 1968), 768; for a treatment of the association of the avian symbol with the Spirit which began way back in early Christian commentary, see Ephrem the Syrian, “Commentary on Genesis,” in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament I: Genesis 1-11*, ed. Andrew Louth (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 6.

⁴⁴ Montague, “The Fire in the Word,” in *Advents of the Spirit*, 39.

⁴⁵ George T. Montague, *The Holy Spirit: Growth of a Biblical Tradition* (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), 67.

⁴⁶ This pneumatological paradigm appears different from the Western epistemological claim which goes back to Aristotle. Aristotle had declared in his *Metaphysics* that the real was necessarily prior to the possible; that the real determines and defines the parameters of the possible. See *Met*, Θ, 1049^b 5. But pneumatologically speaking, the Spirit of God is identified as the possibility of God that through the Word (*dābār*) brings the real into emergent being. The Spirit hovers over the watery chaos, and brings forth creation through the saying of *dābār Elohim*. God does not create out of necessity nor does creation

creatures to the realization of their destinies.

Towards the end of the priestly account precisely in Genesis 1:30, the author mentions the entrustment of “everything that has the breath (*nephesh*- breathing creature) of life” to humans to be cared for as well as for their sustenance. This breath of life is further specified in the Yahwist text as also given to humanity. Thus in Genesis 2:7: “the LORD God formed the man (*ha-’adamah*) from the dust of the ground and breathed (*naphash*) into his nostrils the breath of life (*neshamah hayyim*) and the man became a living being.” The word *neshamah* is used here instead of *rûah* to denote the breath of life given to Adam. However, in Job 27:3: “as long as I have life within me, and the breath of God (*rûah eloah*) in my nostrils,” the word *rûah* describes the breath or the spirit of God and is used as a parallel to *neshamah* (see also Isaiah 42:5).⁴⁷ From these accounts, we notice a connection or an affinity between the breath of life given to all living creatures generally and humans in particular in that *rûah Elohim* is the giver of all life. Of particular interest is the fact that the *rûah* Yahweh who births and is the giver of life to creation is the same breath of life which made Adam become a living being and thus is here portrayed as a gift. The spirit as both the giver of life and the breath of life (gift) is, therefore, as Gary Badcock contends, not something that creatures “possess by permanent right”⁴⁸ since according to the Psalmist, when God takes “away their breath, they die and return to their dust” (Ps 104: 29). The breath of life given by God returns to

emanate necessarily from God. Rather God is absolutely free and creates and relates to the world out of freedom in the power of the Spirit. See Dabney, “The Nature of the Spirit,” in *The Work of the Spirit*, 83.

⁴⁷ See Montague, “The Fire in the Word,” in *Advents of the Spirit*, 36.

⁴⁸ Gary D. Badcock, *Light of Truth and Fire of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 1997), 9.

God at the death of creatures (see Ps 31: 6). This fact makes clear the ontological transcendence of God who alone can give the Spirit to creation.

Basically, the creative and life-giving Spirit brings all of creation into being. St. Irenaeus of Lyons in his famous imagery depicts the Word and the Spirit as the two hands of God in the work of creation and salvation. Other church Fathers such as Athanasius and Gregory of Nyssa hold that whereas the Trinity acts as one and the divine action of creation is one, yet each Person's role is performed in a distinctive pattern. Thus, the unity of action of the three divine Persons does not necessarily eliminate from view the proper role of each distinct Person. A pneumatological reading of Genesis 1-2, nonetheless, suggests that the creative *dābār Elohim* is uttered in the power and within the context of the primordial cosmic hovering over by the Spirit. *Rûah Elohim* is here projected as already active in the work of creation. Thus according to the Psalmist, "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth" (Ps 33: 6; 147: 18).⁴⁹ The Spirit not only births creation but sustains every living creature in being by continually supplying it with the breath of life. This truism is captured by Job 33: 4, "The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty keeps me alive." For as the Psalmist says: "When you hide your face (*pānîm*), they vanish; when you take away their breath, they die and return to dust. When you send forth your spirit (*rûah*), they are created; and you renew the face of the earth" (Ps 104: 29-30).⁵⁰ Montague draws attention to the fascinating relationship in this chiastically structured

⁴⁹ Cf. Jdt 16: 14; see also Donald L. Gelpi, *The Divine Mother: A Trinitarian Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Lanham, MD., New York, and London: University Press of America, 1984), esp. chap. 3.

⁵⁰ See Job 34: 14-15.

text between God's face (*pānîm*) and God's spirit (*rûah*) to score the theological point that God is personally and actively engaged in creation⁵¹ as opposed to Deism.

Therefore, the Spirit does not simply create and then remains aloof from creation. Rather, the Spirit creates, indwells all of creation, present to all of creation, indwells every living creature individually, vivifying, sustaining, and knowing each one in the very depth of its being. This wonderful dynamism of Yahweh's *rûah* as ubiquitous divine presence finds expression in the words of the Psalmist: "O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. ...you perceive my thoughts from afar.... Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD.... Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?" (Ps 139: 1-2, 4, 7). *Rûah* as wind or breath not only pervades the entire creation but also permeates every living creature in a radical way. Like the air we inhale and exhale which permeates us in and out, and enfolds us, so it is that in the medium of *rûah*, we are so interpenetrated that we live and move and have our being in God (See Acts 17: 28). The Spirit who "searches everything, even the depths of God" (1 Cor 2:10) truly knows our individual unique identities more than we know ourselves.

Additionally, another aspect of the work of *rûah Elohim* is not only the giving of life and sustaining it but also the empowerment of every creature to live flourishingly. This, the Spirit does in the very act of creating each being uniquely through the "processes of division, distinction, differentiation, and particularization, beginning with the separation of light from darkness and continuing with the separating out of species of

⁵¹ Montague, *The Holy Spirit*, 71.

plants and types of animals, each in its own or after its own kind.”⁵² In this very act of differentiating, the Spirit, as Colin Gunton argues, “far from abolishing, rather maintains and even strengthens particularity. It is not a spirit of merging or assimilation—of homogenization—but of relation in otherness, relation which does not subvert but establishes the other in its true reality.”⁵³ By endowing all created reality with their distinctness and particularity, the Spirit gives each being the space of freedom to actualize its being and life. The creative and vivifying activity of the Spirit thus endorses the essential goodness and reality of each created being in its distinctness and particularity. God Himself rejoices in the goodness and beauty of creation that His *rûah* has polychromatically designed and wonderfully executed in the progressional affirmatory order from: “God saw that it was good” after each day of creating to the climactic “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” on the sixth and last day of creating.

That all creatures are not morphed into sameness is the basis of relationality since otherness implies not merely difference between things or persons, but also how they are related. Following this logic, God is not creation’s ‘Other’ merely on the basis of substantive difference, but also because of their relatedness. “Only that which is both different and related is ‘other.’ That with which we are identical is not ‘other’; it is simply a repetition of ourselves. That to which we have no relation, on the other hand, is

⁵² Yong, “Ruach, the Primordial Chaos, and the Breath of Life,” in *The Work of the Spirit*, 194-5; see Gen 1: 4-7, 11, 12, 21, 24, 25.

⁵³ Colin E. Gunton, *The One, The Three and The Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 182.

likewise no ‘other’; it is, as far as we are concerned, simply ‘not.’”⁵⁴ Otherness is that which primarily characterizes reality. For it is only in transcending ourselves in the encounter with the Other that we truly affirm ourselves, otherwise we remain trapped within the circle of our autonomous consciousness and interests while experiencing only narcissistic reflections, nay, mirage of ourselves. The indwelling *rûah* is that by which persons “as individuals are transcended, engaged, oriented beyond...[themselves], and related to God and neighbor from the very beginning.”⁵⁵ Creation narrative viewed from a pneumatological perspective, expands the notion of “neighbor” to include all creation embraced by the cosmic breadth of *rûah Elohim*’s presence. It is in this light that Gunton contends that the Spirit is the power of relationality. He writes: “That which is or has spirit is able to be open to that which is other than itself, to move dynamically into relation with the other. Spirit enables a form of perichoresis to take place, between mind and world, world and God.”⁵⁶ It is the presence of the divine Spirit in the world which maintains the transcendence of God as well as God’s embodied presence in creation.

The differentiation in all things, the diversity, the particularity, and their unity because they are differentiated, express the character of *rûah Elohim* as the creative, dynamic, life-giving, and relational presence of God in the world and history.⁵⁷ The Spirit is God’s presence in the body of creation and in the particularity of differentiated bodies.

⁵⁴ Dabney, “The Nature of the Spirit,” in *The Work of the Spirit*, 79.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 82.

⁵⁶ Gunton, *The One, The Three and The Many: God*, 185.

⁵⁷ See Amos Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective* (Aldershot, U.K., and Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2002), esp. chap. 1.

While reaching beyond all “dichotomizing distinctions,” the Spirit is “the relationality that holds things together even as it keeps them distinct,” writes Hodgson.⁵⁸ This reality speaks to a pneumatological aesthetics in creation which proclaims the glory of God. It is such aesthetics that engenders the harmonious polyphony of all living creatures in response to the injunction of their divine Maker and Sustainer: “Let everything that breaths praise the LORD” (Ps 150: 6).

The Spirit as *rûah* is the power that engenders differentiation in all created things. Created things are differentiated or rather individuated because they have body. Corporeality is thus the symbol and vehicle of identity. As a symbol (that which gathers together), the body converges in itself the identity of the self without being identical with the self. In other words, there is something of the self that transcends the body. As a symbol, the self is not reducible to the body. Neither does the self possess any identity within space and time without reference to the body. All living bodies are as such because they have the Spirit of life indwelling them, vivifying, and sustaining them in being. At the same time, the Spirit is the principle of unity of all created things because they are differentiated. The Spirit that indwells differentiated bodies in creation also unites them with God without destroying their differences and otherness. This unity—unlike the Spinozean *Deus sive natura* which conceives God as identical with nature— does not tantamount to identity. Put differently, divine presence in the world does not collapse the difference between God and the world thereby making them one and the same thing. Rather the unity constituted by the Spirit expresses God’s relatedness and immanence in the world. Thus, *rûah* is not in any sense hostile or antithetical to

⁵⁸ Hodgson, *Winds of the Spirit*, 280.

‘body’ or ‘corporeality’ but is that which truly makes the corporeal a living being.⁵⁹ It can then be argued that the presence of the divine Spirit constitutes the sacramentality of embodiment as the site of God’s self manifestation. If that is well taken, then in as much as God constitutes creation through the Creator Spirit, at the same time, God is constituted by relating to the world precisely as manifested.⁶⁰ For the God who is not manifested in history remains unknown and cannot be believed in, and arguably, the God who is unknown, perhaps does not exist, or may at best remain a *fictio mentis*. The knowledge of the revelation of God presupposes and requires the existence of a historical human subject as its condition of possibility. It presupposes a human person, a subject as a pure potentiality and with an obediential but free capacity for hearing, understanding God’s word, and making a free decision in relation to that word. Therefore, God’s history lies in God’s coming to humans within the created order. As Eberhard Jüngel argues, God’s historicity entails God’s being as it comes; it is “being-in-coming.”⁶¹ It is an event-like coming, it is God who comes in the trace. This God who comes in the trace is the God who is love. And because God is love, “this is then God’s being to be related to....”⁶²

⁵⁹ See Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 1, trans. David Smith (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1983), 3.

⁶⁰ For a more sustained argument on this, see Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991).

⁶¹ Eberhard Jüngel, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, trans. Horton Harris (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1976), 346-7.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 222.

Conceiving creation as the embodiment of God enlivened by the Spirit makes a demand on us with regard to our practices and outlook towards the created order. Henry Lederle clearly laments the long provincialization of the Spirit to devotional piety:

For too long the Spirit and his work has been conceived of in too limited a sense. There was a capitulation at the beginning of the modern era in which faith became restricted to the private devotional life and the latter was then described as ‘spiritual.’ The Spirit should not be limited to spiritual experiences and charisms.... The Spirit is at work in the world and should not be degraded to an ornament of piety.”⁶³

Lederle’s lament is a reminder that the ubiquity and pervasiveness of the Creator Spirit embodies God in every aspect of creation and human experience in history. Nothing is further from the truth than to contend that God’s embodiment in creation provides the basis for responsible social, economic, political and ecological engagement in a way that preserves our world and resources, as well as contributes through industry and work to building up and making the world a better and peaceable place for all.⁶⁴ Interestingly, Ivan Satyavrata makes a fascinating suggestion: “Although the work of creation is complete in the sense that God has called it forth and it exists, it remains incomplete and unfinished in that its goal has not been reached.”⁶⁵ Only at the *eschaton* would this goal be reached when creation would have become what it was meant to be. Meanwhile, the Spirit present and active everywhere continually directs creation and history toward its redemptive goal culminating in a renewed creation. Truly, the Creator Spirit not only

⁶³ Henry I. Lederle, *Treasures Old and New: Interpretations of “Spirit-Baptism” in the Charismatic Renewal Movement* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1988), 338.

⁶⁴ Ivan Satyavrata, *The Holy Spirit: Lord and Giver of Life* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 55-7.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 56.

gave life to, but also empowered *adamah* to become a co-creator. We find this fascinatingly expressed in the charge given to Adam not only to name the other creatures but also to subdue the earth (see Gen 1:28; 2:19-20). The charge to subdue the earth does not in any sense connote domination or subjugation but rather the dignity of work because the Creator in whose image humanity has been created is the quintessential Worker Himself, “the universal Master Craftsman”⁶⁶ as is evident in the beauty of the work of creation. Hence the Spirit’s role in the act of creation as well as embodying God’s presence in the created order “places significant obligations upon... [humanity] for stewardship and witness.”⁶⁷ Humanity is thus obliged not to distance itself from any dimension of the Spirit’s activity since the Spirit is present and active everywhere in creation.⁶⁸ It demands openness and docility to the action of the Spirit.

What is of crucial importance to highlight, however, is that the movement of *rûah Elohim* over the face of the watery chaos which birthed the body of creation into being marks “the first, original beginning of God’s salvific self-giving, which is identified with the mystery of creation itself.”⁶⁹ Pope John Paul II rightly suggests, “This biblical concept of creation includes not only the call to existence of the very being of the cosmos, that is to say the giving of existence, but also the presence of the Spirit of God in creation, that is to say the beginning of God’s salvific self-communication to the things he

⁶⁶ Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing the Holy Spirit Through the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 39.

⁶⁷ Satyavrata, *The Holy Spirit*, 56.

⁶⁸ See *Ibid.*, 57.

⁶⁹ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Dominum et Vivificantem, On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1986), § 12.

creates.”⁷⁰ Since God’s self-gift or self-donation in the mystery of creation is nothing but love, then it is at least not implausible to contend that it is the Spirit of God who introduces love into the world. God’s love in creation is expressed as self-gift. By nature (not so much about the whatness or the *quidditas* as about who God is for us), God is essentially a loving and hence a relational Being as biblical evidence bears witness. As both inwardly and outwardly self-communicating, neither self-enclosed nor narcissistic,⁷¹ God freely and graciously loves creation into being as the fruit of that love. God’s self-transcendence in the very act of God’s loving self-gift lets God’s other (the world) to be without collapsing the otherness of the world into God. In effect, this is so to speak, God’s hospitality towards the world. This also implies that God is love ontologically. God’s self-donation does not institute diminution in God since God freely gives of God’s self to otherness “and yet in so doing remains one with himself.”⁷² Arguably, God’s *ekstasis* is not incidental to who God is. Rather who God is—love—finds expression in his ecstasy, his grace. In creation the Spirit gives the breath of God to creatures and in a special way to humanity that it might share and participate in the nature and life of God.⁷³ Humanity created in the image and likeness of God is thus made for love, to love, and for community of love. Indeed, “God for us” (*pro nobis*) and “with us” (*cum nobis*), is ever seeking to freely share his life and love with the world, a love from which not even guilt

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 55.

⁷² Badcock, *Light of Truth and Fire of Love*, 187.

⁷³ See 2 Pet 1: 4.

can separate us.⁷⁴ Rather than a static, self-preoccupied thinking-thought, the God of the Bible is a loving, relational, and ecstatic God. The Spirit's universal presence makes creation to be a sacrament of God's ecstatic love and relationality.

At any rate, the Spirit truly gives life to bodies. But as the Spirit remains, according to Johnson, "the creative and freeing power of God let loose in the world,"⁷⁵ where the life and diversity of bodies become contested and diminished by anti-life forces and empire, the freeing power of the Spirit is at work to challenge, resist, liberate, recreate, renew, and empower. Put another way, the presence of the Spirit continues to make efficacious God's original salvific self-gift in creation expressed in divine loving and compassionate engagement with the ruptured world. In what follows, we shall look at the prophetic work of the Spirit on behalf of justice and wholeness in a fragmented world.

3.2.7 The Prophetic Work of the Liberating and Freeing Spirit

We have seen how Old Testament pneumatology linked the action of *rûah Elohim* with the giving and sustaining of the life of created living creatures in their differentiated bodily particularities. In articulating how the name "Lord" was assimilated to the Spirit against the backdrop of the Exodus liberative motif, we recall that two key elements were isolated: "life and freedom." Having elaborated on how the Spirit gives life in the preceding section, what will guide our exploration as well as the choice and interpretation of texts here is the saving, freeing, resisting, renewing, and liberative *gestalt* of the narrative of the Spirit's action in the face of life-negating situations of human history. It is about the compassionate engagement of the Spirit of God with creation and the human

⁷⁴ See Rom 8: 31-36.

⁷⁵ Johnson, *She Who Is*, 83.

world in its experience of sin, the effects of massive sin as well as brokenness. If the Spirit is, according to the affirmation of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, the Lord and the Giver of life, then one of the upshots of such an affirmation is that, that life given to creatures which makes them living beings and what happens to it, matter to the Spirit who creates and gives the life *ab initio*. Therefore, the Spirit who saves, liberates, and redeems is the same Spirit who first reveals God's original salvific self-giving love in the mystery of creation. As John Paul II notes, "When... God opens himself to man in the Holy Spirit, this opening of God reveals and also gives to the human creature the fullness of freedom."⁷⁶ The universal immanent presence of the Creator Spirit "is always and in all circumstances the reality of God's saving grace."⁷⁷

Now, after Adam and Eve were created and enlivened by the Spirit of life, they alienated themselves from God through disobedience and hence, sin ruptured creation. Creation became subjected to futility but not without hope, groaning for deliverance, and waiting with eager longing to share in the glorious liberty of God's children in the language of St. Paul.⁷⁸ This promise of liberation of God's children which will embrace all of creation is already hinted at in the *protoevangelium* of Genesis 3:15. Yet, such cosmic liberation would be unintelligible apart from the original role of the Spirit in creating and giving life. The Spirit's protological role in creation and in directing creation to its eschatological goal of completion or perfection thus becomes foundational for the

⁷⁶ John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, § 51.

⁷⁷ Jacques Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2006), 83.

⁷⁸ Rom 8:19-22.

Spirit's role in the redemptive work of recreation. In broad terms, redemption here refers to the renewing of creation. Redemption, as Clark Pinnock suggests, "does not leave the world behind but lifts creation to a higher level."⁷⁹ Rather than its negation, redemption is the restoration, nay, the renewal of creation. And the term perfection as used here should not be understood in Aristotelian metaphysical static categories. Instead, it refers to "a movement from imperfection to...the complete realization of the divine purpose"⁸⁰ for a renewed creation. For as long as the in-between times last, "the Spirit keeps creation open"⁸¹ to the future until it attains its final and complete transformation into a new creation. As such, the Creator Spirit is equally the Re-Creator Spirit. There is, to be sure, an essential continuity between the creative and redemptive works of the Spirit.

3.2.8 The Spirit and Divine Enablement/Empowerment

One aspect of the redemptive and liberative action of the relational Spirit that emerges from the OT is that of enablement and empowerment. The Spirit enables the creativity of select individuals and empowers others in order to equip them for specific tasks and services including various leadership roles, prophetic witnesses, and so on. The specific tasks, in other words, are not necessarily limited to the sacred but cut across every spectrum of life and human experience since all dimensions of the created order belong to the Lord and are redeemable. In all cases, the Spirit comes upon or possesses the select individual, instrumentalizing him/her for corporate purposes especially for the

⁷⁹ Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 54.

⁸⁰ Graham A. Cole, *He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2007), 116.

⁸¹ See The Doctrine Commission of the Church of England, "Holy Spirit and the Future," in *We Believe in the Holy Spirit* (London: Church House, 1991), 170ff.

preservation and deliverance of the community in the face of sinister and destructive forces. Through the Spirit, God is “present in everything, in the ordinary and the extraordinary.”⁸² *Rûah*’s enablement thus takes different forms and *gestalt* as the biblical understanding of the nature of *rûah* unfolds and develops in a crescendo fashion toward a clearer articulation of the Spirit’s role in messianic expectations. The Spirit comes upon bodies to empower them for liberative purposes. Let us now look at certain empowered biblical personages.

Joseph: In Genesis 41-43, the Spirit is at work in the tumultuous life of Joseph. The Spirit is recognized to have endowed Joseph with practical wisdom and extraordinary powers of interpreting dreams as well as the capacity to forgive his brothers. On account of the Spirit upon him, Joseph was judged a “discerning and wise man” and hence appointed by Pharaoh as chief administrator over all of Egypt to responsibly manage and administer food supplies in order to save lives in the situation of famine.

Moses: During his encounter with God at the burning bush, Moses was empowered and enabled to go to Pharaoh to work out the freedom of the Israelites from oppression and slavery in Egypt. Ordinarily, Moses would not have been able to accomplish such a feat if not under the enablement of the Spirit of God. Although, reference to the Spirit as the power behind all that Moses had to accomplish in Egypt is not explicit, it nevertheless, remains a fair assumption that such a role could not be played without the empowerment of the Spirit. That Moses actually had the endowment of the Spirit all along is made explicit in Numbers 11:17-26. In the wilderness, burdened

⁸² Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 53.

with the complaints of his contentious people, God instructs Moses to appoint seventy elders and bring them to the tent of meeting to be equipped with the same Spirit that was on Moses to assist him in bearing the burden of the people. To empower the elders, God took of the Spirit that was on Moses with which He endued the seventy elders and immediately they began to prophesy. Even two of the elders who were among the appointed seventy but who could not make it to the tent of meeting with the others also experienced the Spirit's enablement and prophesied in the Camp to the envy of Joshua. In this light Max Turner's comment is apt that "the Spirit of the Lord was perceived as an endowment on Moses...through which he liberated Israel at God's direction."⁸³ Again, it is worthwhile to note that, although, Moses had desired a spirit-filled community as he expressed when Joshua demanded that he (Moses) stop the two elders from prophesying (Num 11:29), "God's spirit had been limited to the seventy elders" (Num 11:17, 25).⁸⁴

Joshua: As the successor of Moses, Joshua was also endowed with the Spirit to enable him complete the Exodus by preserving the life of the people in the face of onslaughts from enemies on the way and eventually leading them into the Promised Land after its conquest. At the time of his appointment, Joshua was described by God as "a man in whom is the Spirit."⁸⁵ Interestingly, when he was commissioned to bring the people into the Promised Land, his name was changed from *Hoshea* (salvation) to *Jehoshu 'a*. The Hebrew *Jehoshu 'a* is a combination of *Yahweh*, *Yah* or *Ya* with *hoshu 'a*

⁸³ Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts: Then and Now*, rev. ed. (Carlisle, England: Paternoster, 1999), 5-6.

⁸⁴ Mary Margaret Pazdan, "Joel," in *The Collegeville Bible Commentary: Old Testament*, ed. Dianne Bergant (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 583.

⁸⁵ Num 27: 18 (NIV).

and means “Yahweh saves.” And after the death of Moses, Joshua was during his succession perceived as a man “filled with the Spirit of wisdom.”⁸⁶ It was under the enablement of the Spirit that he did exploits to save the Israelites.

Judges: Between the conquest of the Promised Land by Joshua and its occupation by the Israelites and the time the monarchy was instituted, about a century and half interval, the Israelite tribes constituted only a loose federation. During that period, the Spirit of the Lord rested upon certain charismatic leaders in the face of the critical situations that the people found themselves. The Spirit empowered them to be liberators and leaders of Israel’s tribes in those critical times. In these narratives of charismatic endowments, *rûah Elohim* remains always the active and determining subject.

Charismatic endowments thanks to which these prophetic leaders and savior figures emerged are so called because they “are spontaneous and temporarily limited gifts conferred on individuals *for* (emphasis original) the whole people.”⁸⁷ These Judges include: *Othniel*, the first Judge in the wake of Joshua’s demise ruled Israel for 40 years (Judg 3: 7-11). The Spirit of the Lord was upon him and enabled him to rout their Mesopotamian oppressors. *Deborah* was another Judge, characterized as a prophetess, and hence, under the enablement of the prophetic Spirit (although the Spirit is not explicitly identified with her leadership, but is a fair assumption to make, since as we have already seen in the case of Moses and the seventy elders, the nexus between the Spirit and prophecy is obvious). In league with Barak, she delivered Israel from the 20 years of Canaanite oppression (Judg 4: 4). *Gideon* (Judg 6: 1-8: 35) under the

⁸⁶ Deut 34: 9 (NIV).

⁸⁷ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 43.

empowerment of the Spirit delivered Israel from the Midianite aggression and judged Israel for 40 years. Furthermore, when the Spirit of the Lord came upon *Jephthah* (Judg 10: 6-12: 7), he led Israel to victory against the Ammonites and, thereafter, ruled for 6 years. In the case of *Samson* (Judg 13: 1-16: 31) said to be the most notorious of Israel's judges and a Nazirite, quite early on in his life, "the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him." Then on three subsequent occasions, "the Spirit of the Lord came upon in power" and gave him such extraordinary physical strength that he tore a lion asunder with his bare hands, killed thirty men in a Philistine stronghold on the way to Ashkelon, and with a donkey's jawbone, he went on to smother a thousand Philistines. Samson judged Israel for 20 years.

The activity of the Spirit in the form of charismatic endowments of liberators and leaders during the time of the judges was always in response to the supplication of Israel for deliverance. Recognizing that their collective crisis was often of their own making,⁸⁸ in repentance the Israelites cried to God for help. God responded by raising up charismatically inspired and empowered judges to save the people from their oppressors.

Monarchy: *Saul* was the last of the judges and with him the monarchy was established as the first king of Israel. As with the time of the judges, the continuity of the activity of the Spirit in relation to the era of human kingship is unmistakable. However, there is a certain discontinuity. Whereas charismatic endowments in the time of the judges were temporary, in the time of kingship, they became more permanent gifts given to Israel's kings to enable them govern the people. Nonetheless, after Samuel anointed Saul king, Saul met with a band of prophets during which he was enmeshed in a religious

⁸⁸ See Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*, trans. John F. Hoffmeyer (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 52.

frenzy and prophetic ecstasy and began to make prophetic utterance as the Spirit came upon him. With the Spirit upon him, Saul was enabled to lead decisively and to zealously deliver Israel.⁸⁹ In this way, the authority of the king which comes from the Spirit is linked with the prophetic office quite resonant with the experience of the seventy elders in Numbers 11 as we saw earlier. Hence, we see the obvious nexus between the Spirit, prophecy, and kingship. But Saul's disobedience caused the Spirit to depart from him to David, thus marking the decline of Saul's kingship.

David: In David's case (1 Sam 16: 12-17: 1ff), the endowment with the Spirit came more directly through the ritual of anointing by Samuel. With David, God put a messianic stamp on Israel's monarchy as expressed in the prophecy of Nathan: "I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever" (2 Sam 7: 13). David was a man after God's own heart and God promises that He will remain with David even as God will be a Father to him and he will be a son to God (see 2 Sam 7: 14). At his anointing, the Spirit of the Lord was upon David, remained with or rested on him. He was empowered to lead and deliver Israel from her aggressors especially from the onslaught of the Philistine aggression led by the giant, Goliath. The kingship of David, therefore, mirrored a pattern of messianic leadership. Under the enablement of the Spirit, David ruled Israel for forty years. But David sinned against God when, not only did he commit adultery with Bathsheba but also plotted the murder of Uriah, her husband in battle. David was not unaware of the nexus between the Spirit, kingship, and prophecy. Having seen how the Spirit's departure from Saul led to his fall, David would not want kingship devoid of the Spirit with a possibility of losing the throne. Hence, in the Psalm (called the *Miserere*) of

⁸⁹ See 1 Sam 9: 26-10: 6-13; 11: 1-11, esp. v. 6).

repentance and confession of sin attributed to David, he earnestly begs God: “Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me” (Ps 51: 11). Although, the OT does not explicitly identify David with prophecy, the only allusion to the prophetic office is found in 2 Sam 23: 1-7, where David uttered an oracle described as his last words by the power of the Spirit. Curiously, if these last words of David were considered an oracle, there is an implication that he may have uttered previous words that equally constituted an oracle. Worthy of note, however, is that the New Testament explicitly links David to the prophetic office in Acts 2: 30 which sees the prophecy encapsulated in Psalm 16 as uttered by David. Be that as it may, as much as it was important, quite early on, for the king to prophesy as evidence that the Spirit was truly upon him, it was even much more important for the king to be subject to the demands of the prophetic word. This is especially the case because in the early days of Saul’s reign and the time of David, Israel had the ideal of kingship that was never to be duplicated either in the northern or southern kingdom until the advent of the eschatological ideal prophetic king.

There is no question that the empowerment of Israel’s leaders by the Spirit enabled them to deliver and preserve the people in times of crisis. It is well to note, however, especially beginning from Joshua in the conquest of the Promised Land through the judges to the kings, that the empowerment by the Spirit appears to be associated with violence as though the Spirit is the Spirit of war and vengeance. What do we make of such a difficult text as, for example, when the Spirit came upon Gideon, he sounded a trumpet, led his army in a victorious campaign against the Midianites, and returned home with their severed heads as trophies (see Judg 6:34-7:25). Another is the case of David in his campaign against the Philistines during which he decapitated the Philistine giant,

Goliath and took his head back to Jerusalem as a trophy (see 1 Sam 11:48-51, 54). Such texts as these and more tend to leave the suggestion that God's *rûah* in the OT has something to do with violence. But according to the helpful suggestion of Michael Welker, it is about "the action of God's Spirit [in] situations of danger in which no escape could be seen.... And they report wholly unexpected deliverance."⁹⁰ This sounds like the ethical principle involved in self-defense where the defense of oneself from unjust aggression may result in the collateral or incidental death of the aggressor. Even the argument that God is always on the side of the oppressed raises the question as to whether that transmutes God into a warrior as some OT texts seem to suggest. The fact, however, remains that the sheer gruesomeness of those battles makes the terrifying and violent aspects of the narratives keep raising more questions than answers.

The Prophets: Although all the prophets do not explicitly attribute their prophetic utterances to the activity of the Spirit, one of the major works of the Spirit in the OT was the inspiration of the prophetic word and visions.⁹¹ Indeed, the third article of the Creed affirms that it is the Spirit "who has spoken through the prophets."⁹² St. Irenaeus, following Justin Martyr, grants that "the prophets were sent by God through the Holy Spirit" and that it was through the Holy Spirit that they prophesied.⁹³ At different times throughout the history of Israel God sent prophets to speak to power the naked truth of God's justice in the face of flagrant abuse and oppression of the weak and defenseless.

⁹⁰ Welker, *God the Spirit*, 52.

⁹¹ Gelpi, *The Divine Mother*, 47.

⁹² See Zech 7:7, 12.

⁹³ Irenaeus, *Dem.*, 6, 30, 49; see Justin Martyr, *Apology* 1, 36ff.

Not only to power, the prophets also addressed God's truth to the entirety of the people when they disobeyed God, calling them to repentance and fidelity to God's commandments. Equally in the face of national crises, the prophets rose to proclaim the message of deliverance and hope.

The prophets may easily be categorized into two classes: the non-writing and the writing prophets. Among the non-writing prophets were: Samuel who was sent to address God's judgment to Saul (1 Sam 15: 24-26); Nathan sent to speak to David on his sin and power abuse (2 Sam 12: 1-15); others were Gad (2 Sam 24: 11-25), Ahijah (1 Kgs 11: 29-39), Micaiah (1 Kgs 22: 8-28), Azariah (2 Chron 15: 1-7), and of interest to us is Elijah sent to Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kgs 21: 17-24) to condemn their idolatry, injustice, and oppression. Elijah was able to accomplish all did at his time when no other prophet was around in Israel because of the Spirit powerfully upon him. That he was strongly empowered by the Spirit is made obvious in the transmission of the Spirit to Elisha who asked to receive a double portion of the Spirit that was upon Elijah (2 Kgs 2).

Among the writing prophets, of particular interest to us are Micah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Joel, in that more than any other, they attributed their prophetic ministry to the overt work of the Spirit. In Micah 3: 5-8, the eight-century pre-exilic prophet, *Micah*, links his proclamation of the prophetic *dābārYahweh* (Word of the Lord) to his empowerment by the Spirit. Basically, his prophetic message impelled by the Spirit was God's condemnation of the flagrant abuse, the pervasive moral corruption, and all sorts of social injustice prevalent at the time in Israel. Micah spoke out in no uncertain terms, decrying the exploitation of the peasants and the poor who were literally despoiled and stripped of their human dignity by the few—the civil and religious leaders—who thrived by

impoverishing the little people to enrich themselves. His was a clamant call addressed to the perpetrators to *metanoia* and to liberate the downtrodden. However, for their indifference to God's love reflected in their oppression of the poor, exile to Babylon was to be their fate, even though God might still redeem them.⁹⁴

Isaiah: Isaiah had a lot to talk about the work of the Spirit during his prophetic ministry. Because of its numerous allusions to the expected messianic king of Davidic lineage, the prophecy of Isaiah is often called the “Fifth Gospel” or the “the Gospel of the Old Testament.” Indeed, the term *rûah* occurs about 50 times throughout the entire corpus. Like Micah, Isaiah was also an eight-century prophet particularly during the reign of Ahaz and Hezekiah. Internally, Isaiah protested against all injustice prevalent in Israel at the time: crimes, idolatry, and their trampling on the poor. Isaiah consequently issued threats of God's judgment against Israel because they added infidelity upon infidelity.⁹⁵ In the face of external oppression, however, Isaiah spoke words of liberation and hope. Indeed, in Proto-Isaiah, during the first plunder of Jerusalem by the Assyrians at the time of Ahaz who refused to listen to the prophet, Isaiah announced the basis of a future hope in the birth of Emmanuel in Isaiah 7: 10ff. At his birth, Emmanuel meaning “God-with-us” will not simply bring God's blessings and divine liberation. Rather, through him, God's presence would dwell among humankind and in him the promises of old would come true. And to Hezekiah who listened to Isaiah, the prophet promised the survival of a remnant of the people of Judah during Sennacherib's Assyrian invasion and Hezekiah resisted the enemy (see 36-37: 1-36).

⁹⁴ See Mic 1-3: 1-12; 4: 9-10.

⁹⁵ See, for example, Isa 1: 21-24; 3: 9-15; 10: 1-4; for judgment see 9: 77-17.

Again, in the midst of the Babylonian invasion still at the time of Hezekiah, Isaiah started to envision the beginning of a new future world. He understood that future to be beyond the present world characterized by violence and injustice. But the new world, more or less, a new creation will be one in which justice and righteousness will prevail. No longer can this new world be brought about by earthly kings. It would require the advent of an ideal king of the line of Davidic kingship, a Messiah upon whom the Spirit will rest and work with a mighty power in a unique and unprecedented way. Hence, out of the tradition of the Davidic kingship and lineage as well grew the Messianic hope.⁹⁶ Unlike the kings before him, the coming Messiah will be the true shepherd, will not rely on violence or oppression, but he will be the Prince of Peace. His zeal for the Lord Almighty will translate into his deployment of God's power as power for compassion to the point of self-giving love climaxing in suffering and death. He will reign on David's throne forever establishing justice and righteousness.⁹⁷

Isaiah, thus, foresees the coming ideal king, the anointed one as the quintessential *pneumatophoros* (bearer of the Spirit). Hence Isaiah 11: 2 says: "The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of Wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord." The reference to "power" in relation to the regal figure who will be mightily endowed with the Spirit, as Max Turner notes, "pertains to the power to ensure freedom from enemies and enforce righteous rule

⁹⁶ Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, Part Two (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011), 6.

⁹⁷ See Isa 9: 5-7; 52: 13-53: 1-12.

against opposition.”⁹⁸ Thus Isaiah 11:3-4 goes further to describe the nature of the Messiah’s rule, about how he will be compassionate, with justice will he judge the poor, and with righteousness decide for the meek. This justice of compassion which the coming Messiah will bring the poor because of his empowerment by the anointing of the Spirit is taken up again in Trito-Isaiah (61: 1-2): “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor....” The identity of the ideal king as Messiah, the anointed one, the liberator par excellence, will be constituted by the Spirit. Messiah, Christ, simply means the one anointed with the Spirit. Somewhere else, Isaiah also makes the point that the anointed one is sent by Yahweh and his Spirit: “and now the Lord, *even* the Lord and his Spirit, hath sent me” {emphasis original (48:16)}.⁹⁹

In the power of the Spirit, he will “initiate the rebirth of all the living for God’s new

⁹⁸ Max Turner, *Power from on High: The Spirit in Israel’s Restoration and Witness in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield, U.K.: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000) 114.

⁹⁹ This translation is from the *Septuagint* which appears to be the original intention of the text. Other similar translations include: *KJV*—“the Lord God, and his Spirit, hath sent me;” *CCB*—“Yahweh the Lord, with his Spirit has sent me.” These translations seem to suggest that the Spirit of God was also actively involved in the sending of the anointed one. However, other translations that do not want to go in this direction give the text a different hermeneutical slant. For example, the *NAB* and the *NAS* say, “the Lord GOD has sent me, and his Spirit.” This translation avoids involving the Spirit in the sending of the anointed one. Rather, it suggests that both the anointed one and the Spirit are sent together in one single act of sending. But the *NIV* has it that “the Sovereign LORD has sent me, with his Spirit;” while the *Amplified* says “the Lord God has sent His Spirit in *and* with me” (emphasis original). What do we make out of all these translations? To be sure, one would not be delusional not to grant that some of these translations are deliberately invested and ideological. Nevertheless, as a constructive way to get around it, it seems legitimately plausible to argue that the anointed one sent by God and/or together with his Spirit, is also the chosen Servant who is pleasing to the Lord, and upon whom the Spirit comes down to rest and to empower for the mission on which he has been sent: “Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him” (Isa 42:1). The sending of the Servant of the Lord is only together within the horizon and in the power of the Spirit. In this way, it is then arguable that the Spirit first sent, birthed, came down in full measure upon, and remained on the one anointed for his redemptive work. The Spirit who reposes on and consecrates the Servant of the Lord is the same Spirit who sends him forth to preach good news to the poor. Thus, it is only as one sent, as one who possesses a full measure of the Spirit in himself that the anointed one is able to, in turn, send the Spirit to others at the definitive conclusion of his earthly messianic mission.

creation.”¹⁰⁰ In many instances, Isaiah announces that the Messiah king who will come, brings liberation, salvation, and will strengthen and restore his people (see 40: 10-13; 62: 11). Isaiah equally envisages that the salvation and justice which the anointed one will bring will be seen by all the ends of the earth (see 52:10; 61:11). For the new heavens and the new earth which God will create will be open to all peoples and nations of every tongue (see 66: 18-19). Correlating the image of water and the Spirit, Isaiah illustrates how the coming God will engender new life, deliverance, and the hope of a peaceful time: “For I will pour water on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants” (44: 3). Again, when at last “the Spirit is poured upon us from on high and the desert becomes a fertile field...Justice will dwell in the desert and righteousness live in the fertile field. The fruit of righteousness will be peace” (32: 15-17). Just as water brings about life in the wilderness, so the outpouring of the Spirit will create new life in those who have been afflicted and desiccated by exploitation and oppression. What clearly emerges from the foregoing Isaiah’s texts is that the rebirth of the Messianic people of the new creation will be the work of the Spirit to be poured out.

Already in Isaiah, we begin to see that the future outpouring of the Spirit will no longer be the prerogative of merely certain select individuals. The Jewish tradition, even as we saw right from the time of Moses, had always limited the enduement of the Spirit of God on persons with official status like judges, kings, prophets, and so forth, who are given specific tasks to accomplish on behalf of the people. Rather, all the people will experience the rebirth from the Spirit to be poured out. God’s Spirit will empower every

¹⁰⁰ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 54.

member of the community of God's people. It is this universal bestowal of the Spirit that is taken up by Ezekiel and Joel.

Ezekiel: Ezekiel, a priest, was one of those deported to Babylonian exile. He received his prophetic mission in the exilic period. More than any other, Ezekiel explicitly acknowledged his prophetic oracles to have been engendered by the enablement of the Spirit (Ezek 2-3: 1-27). The word *rûah* occurs about 46 times in Ezekiel. Moved by the Spirit, the exilic prophet prophesied against the sins of Judah, including those of the people, the leaders, and the false prophets (5-7; 11:1-12; 13:1-23; 22:1-31) as well as the purported stability of cult and peace that presumed the guarantee of God's protection of the Temple. Contrary to this view, Ezekiel, lifted up by the Spirit, beheld the *kābōd* (glory) of God departing from the Temple and announced the certainty of the exile (11: 23-24; 12:8-16). In all this, Ezekiel made thematic the explicit role of the Spirit in his articulation of God's *dābār*. The *kābōd* of God which departed from the Temple was an indication that God's presence was no longer to be seen to be confined to the Temple building orchestrated by cult celebration under the control of the priestly class.

With the vision of the departure of God's glory from the Temple, Ezekiel became more aware of the ever more ubiquitous presence of God to the people. Since God was no longer limited to the Temple, then in the Spirit, God was present to the people even in their place of exile. Likening the exile to some kind of wilderness or even death-like situation, Ezekiel prophesied about the re-animation and re-vivification of their dead bones by the Spirit to make them become living beings once more (Ezekiel 37: 1-14). Ezekiel here projects the Spirit as the one who brings about a new creation and the giver

of new life. The Spirit does not only re-create and re-vivify but also renews the people by purifying and penetrating their hearts making them faithful to God's covenant (36: 24-28). Through the outpouring of the Spirit, "God will be the principle of faithful life and holy life for Israel."¹⁰¹ Not only that, when the Spirit is poured out on Israel, then truly, never again will God hide his face (*pānīm*) from them (39:29) lest they return to their dust. By pouring out the Spirit and putting the Spirit into them, the people will become God's dwelling place, God's Temple, and God's dwelling (*Shekinah*) will be among them.

Joel: As mentioned earlier, even beginning in the time of Isaiah, the expectation of the future Messianic age was already rife. The widespread outpouring and bestowal of the Spirit became more closely tied to it. Thus in Joel, this widespread outpouring of the Spirit became even more radically extended to embrace all peoples, indeed, all flesh.¹⁰² In his vision of eschatological events, Joel declares: "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophecy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days" (Joel 2: 28-29). What is radical and unusual in this text is the mention of "servants" (both men and women, that men-servants and handmaids). Except for their Sabbath rights protected by the sabbatical and Jubilee laws of Sabbath rest and release (Ex 20:10; Deut 12:12, 18; 16:11, 14), these category of

¹⁰¹ Congar, *I Believe*, 9. This spiritual renewal to be accomplished by the Spirit also became thematic in some of the postexilic prophets. See for example, Hag 2:5; Zech 4:6, 12:10; Neh 9:20.

¹⁰² In place of "all peoples or all mankind" upon whom the Spirit will be poured out, Pazdan insightfully notes that the "Revised Standard Version translates the Hebrew as 'flesh' to emphasize the contrast between human weakness (see Isa 40:6; Ps 56:5) and God's vital power, which will transform their lives." See Pazdan, "Joel," in *The Collegeville Bible Commentary*, 583.

persons were excluded from the scheme of things in the community. Indeed, they were simply not considered members of the community. Hence the radicality of Joel's prophecy means that "participation in God's spirit implies *equal* (emphasis original) status for each person in the community."¹⁰³ The Messianic expectations and the hope for the universal outpouring of the Spirit are believed to have been fulfilled in the New Testament. The Spirit that will be poured out on all flesh, the heart of flesh, indicates once again that the Spirit is not antithetical to corporeality and history. Rather, the Spirit seeks body, animates, recreates, renews, liberates, and redeems body by resisting and subverting whatever life-negating forces that threaten the integrity and dignity of body. The Spirit empowers all flesh from their powerlessness and weakness and liberates and restores all who have been previously excluded and oppressed to the equal dignity of all humanity. In the light of the biblical testimony we have been examining, there is, accordingly, no room in the OT for what Welker describes as docetic pneumatology which removes the Spirit and the work of the Spirit from the domain of corporeality and history while relegating it to some form of ethereality.¹⁰⁴ The Spirit is really active in time and space with creation and humanity in flesh and blood.

Before proceeding to treat the role of the Spirit in the life of the Messiah and subsequently in the church, it might well worth it to look briefly at the reading of the OT by and as Christians. Previously, I mentioned that in the OT the Spirit had not yet acquired a distinct personhood. Put another way, the Spirit in the OT was predominantly viewed as an impersonal force or the power of God at work in creation and history. But to

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Welker, *God the Spirit*, 179, 179n87.

sustain the nexus between the OT and NT understanding of the Spirit, it is crucial to look at how Jesus himself and the early Christians understood their continuity by how they read the OT with regard to the Spirit.

3.2.8.1 Christian Reading of the Old Testament in Relation to the Spirit

Considering the pluriform semantic range of the Hebrew word *rûah*, some authors have argued, on the one hand, that it is anachronistic and reductionist to equate *rûah* simply with the Spirit of God and talk less with the Holy Spirit. According to this position, to do so amounts to eisegesis (reading meaning) into the OT.¹⁰⁵ Upholders of this view thus call for minimalism. On the other hand, others view all the works attributed to the OT *rûah* as evidence of the activity of the trinitarian third Person.¹⁰⁶ Advocates of this position are viewed as maximalist in orientation.

While it is a truism that the OT has its own canonical integrity, the question remains how the early Christians theologically interpreted the OT. No doubt, the veracity of the Trinity and hence, the distinct personhood of the Holy Spirit are NT revelations. Yet, Christian theological hermeneutics acknowledges the inspiration of both Testaments as the work of the same Holy Spirit. Indeed, as Gerald O'Collins maintains, all the OT personifications of the Spirit and Word paved the way for the eventual acknowledgment of the Trinity.¹⁰⁷

That the Holy Spirit was already active in the OT is attested to by Jesus himself.

¹⁰⁵ See Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts*, 4, 4n2; C. F. D. Moule, *The Holy Spirit* (London and Oxford: Mowbray, 1978), 19, 106, 106n12.

¹⁰⁶ See Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Henri De Vries (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1975), 27.

¹⁰⁷ Gerald O'Collins, *The Tripersonal God: Understanding and Interpreting the Trinity* (New York and Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist, 1999), 34.

For instance, in Mark 12:35-36, “While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, ‘How is it that the teachers of the law say that the Christ is the son of David? David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared’: ‘The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I put all your enemies under your feet.’” In this case, Jesus was alluding to the prophetic utterance attributed to David in Psalm 110:1. Jesus saw this Davidic oracle as inspired by the Holy Spirit. Again, in Acts 1:15-16, “In those days Peter stood up among the believers...and said, ‘Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus...’” Here too, Peter read Psalms 69:25 and 109:8 as inspired by the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, in Acts 4:25, when Peter and John rejoined the group of believers after their release by the Sanhedrin and reported all they underwent in the hands of the chief priests and elders, the believers, among other things, prayed thus: “Sovereign Lord.... You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David...” The believers’ prayer in this instance refers to Psalm 2:1-2. Even Irenaeus follows this pattern and admits: “Wherefore the Holy Spirit says by David: *Blessed is the man who hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly*” (emphasis original).¹⁰⁸ On the basis of this pattern of theological hermeneutics by Jesus himself, the apostles, the early Christians, and the Fathers, it is arguable then that the OT references to the Spirit of God are evidence to the distinct personhood of the Holy Spirit albeit unnamed but already active in the OT.

Moreover, if Jesus could locate himself in the OT testimonies, for instance, when he appeared after his resurrection to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and

¹⁰⁸ Irenaeus, *Dem.*, 2; cf. Ps 1:1.

eventually to the apostles in Jerusalem, he made them understand everything written about him in the Scriptures starting from Moses through the prophets to the Psalms (see Lk 24: 13-27, 44-47); and if the NT writers could also decipher Christ in the OT witnesses, for example, Paul sees Christ as the Rock that provided Israel water in the desert (see 1 Cor 10: 1-4), then following the same trend, it becomes plausibly arguable that the Holy Spirit has also been actively at work in the OT. We shall now return to the question of the Spirit and the messiah.

3.2.9 The Spirit and the Messiah

From both the Nicene creedal order and what appears to be the commonest trinitarian taxis—Father, Son, and Spirit—the impression has too often been that the Spirit comes only after Christ. To put it differently, the Spirit often tends to be viewed to have arrived for the first time at Pentecost after being sent by the risen and ascended Christ. But from our investigations so far, it is clear from the Hebrew Scriptures that the Spirit has not only been actively at work in creation but even before the coming of the Messiah, the Spirit as divine presence has always constituted part of the religious experience of the people of God. We equally saw the dynamic, reciprocal relationship between Spirit and Word in the OT as distinct but inseparable mediators of divine presence. In addition, during the intertestamental period, wisdom (*hokmah* in Hebrew or *Sophia* in Greek) was used in sapiential literature to designate the Spirit and became a key category for speaking about divine presence.¹⁰⁹ Pentecost, thus, is not the first coming of the universal Spirit in history. Rather, it marks the apogee of the grandiose outpouring and, indeed, a more perfect manifestation of the same Spirit who has been

¹⁰⁹ See Wis 1:5-7; 7:7, 21-23; 8-9:1-17; Prov 8:1-36; Sir 1:1-10; 4:11-19; 15:1-10; 24:1-34.

ever-present from the very beginning.

It is worth noting, however, that the Spirit does not simply come after Christ but has always accompanied the Word. Indeed, Mary conceived Jesus as the Son of God by the Holy Spirit (Lk 1:35). The Holy Spirit who overshadowed Mary¹¹⁰ and engendered the conception of Jesus of Nazareth reminisces the Spirit of God which in the very beginning hovered over the primeval waters and birthed creation. Indeed, the Creator Spirit created the humanity of Jesus in his incarnation. Before his conception, the angel from heaven had given his name to Mary. The name Jesus is the same name as *Jehoshu'a* (the Lord saves). Thus, the name of Jesus reaches into the very mystery of God (as Savior or Liberator) revealed to Moses at the burning bush. At his baptism, Jesus was anointed and empowered by the Holy Spirit to carry out his prophetic ministry (Lk 3: 21-22) and claimed by God as His Son.¹¹¹ Fully endowed with the Holy Spirit, he was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted and to overcome (Lk 4:1-2). And on his return to Nazareth after baptism and overcoming temptation, Jesus read from the text of Isaiah 61:1-2; 58:6 (see Lk 4:18-19) in the synagogue on a Sabbath. In the end, Jesus proclaimed the fulfillment of the text in him as the Messiah of OT expectation. Jesus appropriated this Isaianic material to declare the nature of his mission under the

¹¹⁰ A fact that has too often been neglected in the account of the Spirit's overshadowing of Mary is the active part played by Mary in the Annunciation scene. In an attempt to accentuate the unique work of the Spirit in the birth of the Messiah, the active role of Mary has not too infrequently been eclipsed. While it is important to accent the fecundity of the Spirit in the "virginal conception" in order to protect the divine initiative in the coming to being of Jesus, such should not be done at the expense of Mary's collaboration. Her active and fruitful yes to the divine initiative and the Spirit's fecundity was necessary without which there could not have been any conception in the first place, at least, in the sense that we know it from the New Testament.

¹¹¹ David Coffey contends that "the bestowal of the Spirit brings about the divine Sonship of Jesus. The bestowal of the Spirit enters into the very constitution of his Sonship." See his article, "The Holy Spirit as the Mutual Love of the Father and the Son," *Theological Studies* 51 (1990):203.

empowerment of the relational Spirit. The identity of Jesus as the Son of God and as the Messiah, the Savior, cannot, therefore, be understood apart from the endowment of the Spirit in his life. As Gregory Nazianzen maintains, the Spirit both precedes Christ and follows Christ. There is to be no subordination of any to the other or supersession of any by the other.¹¹²

The prophetic Spirit anointed and empowered Jesus not only to overcome Satan, temptation, and sin through obedience to the Father and counterviolence, but also by his prophetic life-style and stance —though non-partisan but definitely not apolitical—to mount resistance against massive evil. Early on, St. Irenaeus of Lyons in his theory of recapitulation, clearly recognized the redemptive significance of not only the passion and death but also the incarnation and life of Christ.¹¹³ In the dominant Western soteriology, however, much accent has been placed on the atoning and redemptive death of Christ (in isolation) which saves from personal sin to the neglect of the redemptive significance of the entire life of Christ expended in self-giving love (including his choice and defense of the neglected and excluded, the vulnerable, the exploited, and his stance against systemic evil such as injustice, and so on). We shall return to this issue in a later section. At any rate, it is as one who is birthed by the Spirit, one on whom the Spirit descends and rests, one who is first given the Spirit without measure (cf. Jn 3:34) that Jesus would be the bestower of the Spirit from the Father on believers. Indeed, the Spirit is not just the gift of Christ but also the giver of Christ as well.

¹¹² See Gregory Nazianzen, *Fifth Theological Oration*, §§ 29, 31.

¹¹³ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, V, 21, 2-3; see also Hans Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), 124.

3.2.9.1 Jesus as Messiah and the Reign of God

Asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was to come, Jesus answered them by dismissing any construal that would comprehend the kingdom in terms of geographical locatedness or physicality. Nevertheless, he affirmed, “For behold, the kingdom of God is [already] among you” (Lk 17:20). Again, when it was insinuated by the Pharisees that the source of Jesus’ power for performing exorcisms was from Beelzebul, the prince of the devils, Jesus responded by pointing to the Spirit as the source of his empowerment. Reproaching their deliberate attempts to ignore at best or obfuscate at worst what was clearly the demonstration of God’s power, Jesus declared: “But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Mtt 12:28). In the ministry of Jesus, the Spirit inaugurates the *basileia tou theou*. As Jesus proclaimed in his inaugural sermon in Nazareth noted previously, he was aware up till the moment he gave up his spirit on the cross (Lk 24:46) that the relational Spirit engendered liberation, forgiveness, deliverance, healing, restoration, and hope through his ministry. The endowment of Jesus with the Spirit without measure marked the explicit inauguration of God’s reign and the dawn of the new creation of all things. The Spirit, as Moltmann puts it, “makes Jesus ‘the kingdom of God in person,’ for *in the power of the Spirit* (emphasis original) he drives out demons and heals the sick; in the power of the Spirit he receives sinners, and brings the kingdom of God to the poor. This...power of God is given him not for himself but for others: for the sick, the poor, sinners, the dying.”¹¹⁴ Thus, the subversions encapsulated in the inaugural sermon which Jesus executed in his ministry and which the Pharisees tried to misrepresent, clearly show that

¹¹⁴ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 60.

the reign of God with its characteristic radical reversals has been inaugurated.

In the Roman empire of the time of Jesus as in every empire, the core principle was domination. Imperial domination is often expressed in the deployment of the instrument of control to subject all into the category of sameness. In this setting, those who appear different are usually excluded. The reach of Empire is not merely geographical and political. It also wields control over every domain of life—religion, culture, economy, health, physiognomy and psychology, intellect and knowledge, wealth distribution, power, and so on—with the consequence that those who appear to fall outside the purported grid of the dominant normativity are perceived as deviant, as different (in a degenerate sense), as “other,” and hence, marked out for oppression and exclusion.¹¹⁵ Empire is thus characterized by the entrenchment of an imperialistic monoculture whose operative mechanism runs on core-periphery and top-down paradigm. Such totalitarian paradigm and unilateral run of power entails the subjugation of the minorities, those at the margins, the weaker peoples, and smaller cultures by empire.¹¹⁶ A crucial consequence of this monocultural imperialism is that its victims are often forced into invisibility as subjects and persons with their own group distinctive and specific expectations, experiences, perspectives, and desires. Jesus’ proclamation of the reign of God, among other things, as Bruce Malina suggests, unfolded within the context of the problem posed by imperialistic Roman political economy and culture as well as by

¹¹⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 182-3; see also *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Collin Gordon, trans. C. Gordon et al (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

¹¹⁶ See Richard P. Saller, “Roman Empire,” in *The Oxford Guide to the Bible*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 657-9; see also E. Badian, “Roman Empire,” in *Ibid.*, 781-2.

local Israelite aristocracy, the fanatic, hierarchized, bureaucratic, and pharisaic religiosity.¹¹⁷

Contrary to the operative mechanism of empire rooted in the politics of domination, violence, and control, Jesus demonstrated the power of God's reign in terms of "struggle" (power in weakness) expressed in the politics of compassion and self-giving love as an alternative. The Gospels are replete with many instances of such display of compassion by Jesus. For example, Jesus reached out and touched a leper (at a time when lepers were regarded as among the worst sinners by the religious establishment and ostracized from the society of normal people) in order to heal him (Mtt 8:2-3). He welcomed the touch of the hopeless and frustrated woman with issue of blood considered as unclean and healed her (Mtt 9:20-22), forgave the paralytic (Mtt 9:1-2), criticized his own generation and the Pharisees and Sadducees (Mtt 12:38-45; 16:1-4), preached the Good News to and fed the drifting and hapless crowd (Mtt 14:13-21), renounced power as domination (Mtt 23:8-12; Mk 10:41-45), spoke truth fearlessly to power (Mtt 23:13-39), welcomed children (Mk 10:14), mingled with the despised (Lk 7:36-50; 19:1-10), and so on. In these different circumstances Jesus enacted his politics of compassion as a demonstration of the reign of God that has come. Compassion and solidarity entail siding, identifying, and bearing the suffering of others with them to the extent of doing something practically to relieve their misery even at the risk of one's own life (see Isa 42:3; 50: 6; 53:4-5). Since there can be no such thing as true love or compassion without solidarity, solidarity thus entails some form of incarnation or identification with. In the

¹¹⁷ Bruce Malina, *The Social Gospel of Jesus: The Kingdom of God in Mediterranean Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 34.

words of the Spanish-born Jesuit theologian, Jon Sobrino, “Solidarity that was not prepared to share the lot of those with whom it wanted to show solidarity would be paternalism, to put it mildly, or would lead to despotism. Solidarity in a world of victims [and the silenced] that was not prepared to become a victim would in the end not be solidarity.”¹¹⁸

Jesus’ Spirit empowered politics of compassion and prophetic stance would bring him into a seething and searing controversy with the establishment (the political and religious authorities). His politics of compassion subverted the politics of domination, greed, and exploitation at his time. No doubt, his life-style, his ministry of self-giving love, compassion, and his prophetic stance challenged the violence¹¹⁹ and life-negating structures of the religious, economic, and socio-political power relations in his universe. Consequently, those who benefitted from the status quo conspired and forged a pernicious alliance to eliminate him. In fact, Jesus posed a threat to the empire and its socio-political and religious status quo by offering a distinct and opposite alternative.¹²⁰ His unmasking of oppression which was sublimated and justified in the name of God and religion; his denunciations of the oppressors and forms of power that structure oppression in society at his time especially as represented and exercised by certain classes and groups (such as the Pharisees and scribes, the chief priests and the rich, the rulers and the aristocrats), as well as his defense of the oppressed formed part of Jesus’ prophetic

¹¹⁸ Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Paul Burns and Francis McDonagh (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2007), 245.

¹¹⁹ Malina, *The Social Gospel of Jesus*, 68.

¹²⁰ Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 206; see Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (London: SCM Press; New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 128-36.

praxis. Jesus, of course, situated himself within Israel's classic prophetic tradition and as such, knew that the fate of the prophets would be his lot as well (see Lk 13:32-33). Nevertheless, his prophetic praxis aimed, *inter alia*, at summoning whole groups and collectivities (and not merely individual sinners) whose power structure perpetrates systemic evil and oppression sublimated in God's name, to conversion for the purpose of the transformation of society. This does not mean to reduce the ministry of Jesus to merely social activism and ideological exercise. It rather means to say that Jesus took the whole life of society seriously especially its structural dimensions that produced innocent victims in order to transform it through offering alternative values. As a divine figure but incarnated in history, his prophetic praxis and entire life could not but be meaningful in the light of the spatio-temporal conditions of his time including the religious, social, economic, political, ideological, cultural, and so forth. Thus, Jesus not only proclaimed the kingdom of life but also denounced the anti-kingdom, unmasking its different death-dealing aspects: religious, social, economic, etc.

The Spirit empowered ministry of Jesus had to necessarily unmask and confront sin and evil in its different guises and manifestations—personal and social (which essentially has economic and political ramifications)—thereby making his ministry ineluctably assume a public character. Non-partisan, albeit he was, that does not mean that Jesus' Spirit-inspired ministry and history was apolitical or had no social and economic implications. He was definitely on the side of the oppressed, the hapless and downtrodden, the voiceless, the marginalized, the violated, the excluded, and, indeed, those on the underside in order to bring them the justice and compassion of God. His ministry and indeed his entire history was not simply all about preserving peace and

harmony as in pure pacifism (understood in the sense of absence of conflict).¹²¹ Rather, Jesus' Spirit-enabled ministry was also subversive, however, not in the Zealots' revolutionary sense.¹²² In proclaiming the kingdom of God for the poor, Jesus proffered an alternative way of establishing it different from the religious nationalisms and violent political theocratic model—friend-enemy—espoused by the Zealots. By contrast to Zealotism, the kingdom Jesus proclaims and expresses in his life, words, and deeds, was to be established through such humanizing values as truth, justice, compassion, love, and above all, by grace. He boldly and radically challenged the establishment to self-criticism, denounced the alienation and inhumanity of their oppressive deeds, called them to *metanoia*, and to end the cycle of violence, while offering them liberation and hope. Because his Spirit-inspired insurgence against injustice and evil made the comfortable and powerful uncomfortable, when arraigned before Pilate the chief priests and the elders

¹²¹ Jesus experienced daunting number of conflicts with the powerful in his society in his efforts and struggles to give life to the sick, the dead, the needy, the downtrodden, the sinners, and others. The Gospels are replete with such conflicts. See, for example, Mtt 13:57; Mk 6:4, Jn 4:44, Lk 4:24, 28—how Jesus was not accepted in his own town of Nazareth and the attempt to throw him over a cliff; Mk 3:2, 6—Pharisees and Herodians plot against Jesus; Lk 11:53ff—Pharisees became very hostile toward Jesus; Lk 13:31-33, Jesus is warned that Herod wants to kill him because the kind of expectations Jesus aroused in the people evidently had political impacts, but Jesus without mincing words roundly speaks of Herod to the heralds of the warning: “Go and tell that fox...,” Lk 19:47; 20:19—while in Jerusalem, the scribes and chief priests look for Jesus to kill him; Mk 11:15-19—after the cleansing of the Temple, the chief priests and scribes deliberate to kill Jesus; other passages include, Mtt 22:34-35; Mk 12:1-12, 13-17, 18-23, 28-34; Mtt 26:3; Mk 14:1; Lk 22:1. Still others in Johannine pericope include, Jn 2:24—Jesus suspicious of the Jews; 5:16, 18—Jesus persecuted because he healed on the Sabbath; 7:1, 11, 19, 30, 32, 44; 10:31—the Jews look for an opportunity to arrest and kill Jesus; 8:20, 59; 10:31—they picked up stones to throw at him; 11:45-54—after raising Lazarus, the chief priests, the Pharisees, and the Sanhedrin out of envy plan to kill Jesus for doing such miracles and winning people over to his side. In all this, the ministry of Jesus put him in constant conflict with the powers and ideologies in his time which culminated in his betrayal by Judas Iscariot and his execution like a criminal even though he was innocent. Jesus' death was the death of an innocent victim. It is with the many innocent victims who are still been produced by contemporary empire that Jesus stands in solidarity as he continually incarnates in them.

¹²² See Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, Part Two, 13-23.

of the people accused him of being a political subversive (Lk 23:2, 13-14; Jn 19:12-15). They murdered him out of colossal hatred, envy, and brutal injustice. But even at that, Jesus was not a passive victim in his suffering and death. It was not his victimizers, neither was it death itself that were the determining agents in his death. There is little doubt that Jesus was fully aware of what was going to be his fate in the conflict with the death-dealing forces and gods of the anti-kingdom. He knew that the fate of the prophets who went long before him awaited him (see Lk 13:31-33). Rather, in the power of the Spirit he freely and actively laid down his life for the sake of his friends. Nor was his death simply a pacification of God's anger against humanity going by traditional atonement theory. It was fundamentally engineered as a result of State hatred and scapegoatism¹²³ to which Jesus, however, actively surrendered as a sign of his credible solidarity and irrevocable love for his friends. As Sobrino succinctly puts it, "And where his own fate was concerned, Jesus—hard and verbally aggressive to the point of insult when defending the poor and oppressed—offered himself without resistance to his persecutors."¹²⁴ By so doing, Jesus proved that nothing, absolutely nothing, not even death could constitute an obstacle to God's irrevocable saving love for his friends in the throes of life-negating anti-kingdom. Be that as it may, through his self-giving love even in death, the compassionate and "gracious God of Jesus enters into solidarity with all

¹²³ It was for religious and political reasons more so than any other that the powers connived to kill Jesus. Caiaphas, the High Priest with the Pharisees and the Council plotted to murder Jesus after they ascertained that the raising of Lazarus and other miracles were drawing more people to Jesus. For the reason that to safeguard their Holy Place (the Temple—symbol of their power and authority in the name of God) and their nation from being swept away by the Romans, Caiaphas gave expression to their disposition without any circumlocution: "It is better to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation be destroyed" (Jn 11:50).

¹²⁴ Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 214-15.

those who suffer and are lost.”¹²⁵ It is this God’s definitive love that saves. And because God’s love saves, we know him as truly God-*with-us* and God-*for-us*. What is most consoling, nonetheless, is that the power of the Creator Spirit who is also the Recreator Spirit transcends death. Thus in the power of the Spirit the giver of life, God raises Jesus “in new, unimaginable life as pledge of a future for all the violated and the dead.... and the whole cosmos itself.”¹²⁶ This brings us back to the point that the relational, Creator Spirit remains unpredictable, uncontrollable, unrestrainable, and undomesticable. The ubiquity of the Spirit who gives life holds sway even beyond death. After his death and resurrection, Jesus sends the promised Spirit from the Father to the disciples.

3.2.9.2 The Spirit and the Church

The Spirit, the giver of life in whose power Jesus is raised from the dead to new life is the same Spirit who has been poured out on the disciples on Pentecost. In the midst of the enveloping mighty wind and in hovering over and resting on each one of the disciples in the form of tongues of fire, the Spirit birthed the church (Acts 2:2-3). The early Christian community was clearly convinced that the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost after the ascension of Christ—in accordance with Luke’s chronology (Lk 24:51; Acts 1:9)—was the fulfillment of the OT promise of a universal and inclusive bestowal of the Spirit in Joel as noted previously. The Spirit empowers the circle of disciples with a variety of gifts and different callings to witness to the saving power of Christ and to be a sign of the reign of God in the midst of the brokenness of this world. In this new community, the presence of the resurrected Christ will continue to be present to

¹²⁵Johnson, *She Who Is*, 159.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 58-9.

the church and to the world in the Spirit. The Pentecost event of the outpouring of the Spirit on “all flesh” in fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy is important for our purpose in furthering our claim that the relational Spirit seeks and rests on body, gives life, engenders plurality and equality, and resists anti-life forces.

3.2.9.3 The Spirit and Pluralism

The Spirit who is being bestowed on all flesh for their empowerment relativizes the imperial monoculture, monolingualism, and unilateral flow of power in empire. By broadening the reach of the Spirit’s inspiration and empowerment not only to a privileged few, the Spirit resists all that empire stands for—domination and control. The enablement of all flesh means, as Welker suggests, that “a specific group of people, a specific stratum, a specific tradition, or a specific culture can no longer claim for itself alone God’s presence, the reception of the Spirit, prophetic testimony, and true definitions of reality.”¹²⁷ The Spirit is bestowed on all irrespective of differences: old and young, male and female, master and servant, privileged and disadvantaged. By empowering all, typical differences notwithstanding, the Spirit fosters unity and equality in the midst of differences. This fostering of pluralism and heterogeneity which shatters the core of imperialistic monoculturalism—a particular perspective or culture of the dominant or privileged group paraded as universal—further finds expression in the bestowal of the gift of *polyglossia* by the Spirit during the Pentecost event. When the Spirit descended on the Galilean disciples, as Paul writes, “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim” (Acts 2:4). The unpredictability and uncontrollability of the power of the Spirit which cannot be merely

¹²⁷ Welker, *God the Spirit*, 155.

contained within the familiar and the comfortable blossoms forth in the profusion of speech to the utter bewilderment and astonishment of all those gathered from every nook and cranny of the globe. What at first appears to be a confusion of languages as in Babel is quite dissimilar to Babel, in that in the Pentecost event, each of those gathered heard in his or her own native language and idiom. Those gathered included Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamians, Judeans, Cappadocians, Asians, Phrygians, Pamphylians, Egyptians, Libyans, Cyreneans, Romans, Arabs, Cretans, and others (cf Acts 2:5-12).

The gift of *polyglossia* means that no one single language can express fully the mysterious immensity of the Spirit. The outpouring of the Spirit inherently requires a pluriversality of languages and narratives, and different peoples to give it expression. With the Pentecost experience which dismantles the stranglehold of monoculturalism, unilateralism, and uniformism, there is no more place for any one particular culture, tradition, group, or dominant voice to claim monopoly of the true definition of reality which becomes universalized or even absolutized. In this connection, it is difficult not to agree with Hodgson's suggestion that: "There is neither a singular, monolithic truth nor a plurality of truths but rather a truth that is itself inherently pluralistic, reflecting the pluralism of universal reality."¹²⁸

The Spirit of Pentecost, indeed, sustains plurality, difference, and heterogeneity. In the church, the Spirit sustains the life of the body of Christ by indwelling human bodies and providing them with different gifts. Various, Paul frequently describes the Spirit as indwelling human bodies: "You are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you" (Rom 8:9). Again, "If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells

¹²⁸ Hodgson, *Winds of the Spirit*, 110.

in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit that dwells in you” (Rom 8:11; cf. 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19). By being poured out on all flesh, the Spirit subverts the unsalutary differences created by empire which makes a certain class the dominators and others on the underside the subjugated. The Spirit resists these power differentials by creating an alternative pluralism in which all are empowered and not simply some or the merely privileged. In this way, the Spirit creates a certain egalitarianism among the empowered. While fostering pluralism and encouraging an affirmation of differences, it is not all differences that should be reinforced. As Welker writes, all “unrighteous differences”¹²⁹ should be done away with. That is, differences that are life threatening, death-dealing, oppressive, or life-negating, are to be discouraged and resisted. While those that cultivate and flourish life should be sustained. It is positive difference that the Spirit promotes. The Spirit that is poured out on all people means, as Moltmann notes, “that the traditional privileges come to an end—the privileges of men compared with women, of lords compared with servants, of adults compared with children.”¹³⁰

A crucial point to grasp is that the Spirit does not simply empower those who previously had no power and perhaps merely raise them to the same level with those who wielded power before. In other words, the insurgent Spirit does not simply accomplish a formal equality (which in this sense is equal to sameness). For such notion of formal equality would make it extremely difficult if not impossible to unmask and name how difference has often been maneuvered to continue to structure privilege and advantage

¹²⁹ Welker, *God the Spirit*, 25.

¹³⁰ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 57.

versus oppression and disadvantage. Equality is not the same as sameness or homogeneity. For there can be no genuine equality unless distinct groups, their specific culture, specific perspectives on reality, distinct experiences which form a crucial dimension of social existence in a particular contextual situation are recognized and affirmed. Blindness to difference when it is assimilated, under the guise of formal equality, into sameness often oppresses minority groups whose difference is delineated by the dominant groups as deviant on the basis of their (the dominant's) own purported neutral unsituated humanity. Therefore, whereas the Spirit strengthens those who are powerless, at the same time, the Spirit interpellates, resists, and restricts the powers and privileges that have been pernicious and death-dealing. It is in this sense that we can say that the life giving and liberating Spirit is on the side of the oppressed while restricting harmful powers and summoning their agents to *metanoia* and to the challenge of justice. God, undoubtedly, loves equally. At the same time, however, God's love is not neutral. God's love in the Spirit, as abundant biblical testimony affirms, is always a preferential option, a predilection for the powerless and defenseless, the voiceless, the weak, the vulnerable, the oppressed, the exploited, and the poor. He is the God of the poor and oppressed (see Ex 22:21-27; Ps 9:10; 68:6; 140:13; 146:7-9). In this way the relational Spirit creates relations that are life-giving rather than life-diminishing. And in this way, the relational Spirit engenders equality that at the same time affirms positive differences while fostering the inclusion and participation of all in the community of the empowered.

Another consequence of the Pentecost outpouring of the Spirit on all people is that those who are now empowered by the indwelling of the life-giving, resistant, and liberating Spirit, are to embody and propagate the same activities of the Spirit by

promoting justice and the flourishing of life for all in a fragmented and violent world. The community birthed by the resistant Spirit is a community of memory. It is a community of the dangerous memory of Jesus,¹³¹ as Johann B. Metz suggests, even as he placed himself in the prophetic tradition. It is a community of memory because it shapes and nourishes its identity by reliving the narratives of Jesus and the early Christian community, a community of resistance, reconciliation, possibilities, and hope. What we have been discussing in this section is that the Spirit poured out on all flesh does not obliterate difference. Rather, the Spirit promotes positive difference and plurality while at once relativizing and resisting harmful difference that structures privilege and oppression. We shall take a closer look at the construction of difference later on in order to figure out ways to engage the ambiguities inherent in the term. In the meantime, let us examine certain patristic positions on the significance of the relational Spirit and body in relation to identity and difference as well as to its relevance or otherwise for who we are with regard to God's salvific act.

3.3 Christian Tradition and Embodiment

From what we have discussed so far, the witness of the Bible depicts the Holy Spirit to not be opposed to corporeality. Nature, bodies (and hence plurality, diversity, and difference), and the interconnectedness of reality are no strangers to the Spirit. It is by now clear that the Spirit births and sustains the life of the world. Since our bodies are symbols, they bear the mark of our different traditions as well as cultural differences. In

¹³¹ See Johannes B. Metz, *Theology of the World*, ed. W. Glen-Doepel (New York: Burns and Oats, 1969); *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, ed. D. Smith (New York: 1980).

our bodies too we are differentiated and individuated in the sense that no two persons are identical, even the identity of so-called identical twins still does not render collapsible their identity, individuality, or particularity. As a bearer and not merely the constitution of difference, how we approach the question of body speaks much about our perspectives with regard to the issue of difference. If the Creator and relational Spirit instilled diversity and plurality in creation, promoted and elevated them at Pentecost without morphing all into sameness, are our differences relevant to God? Does the body matter to God and so with its embodiedness to be redeemed or is it merely a temporary expedient to be dispensed with and transcended at the long run in the resurrection? Ambiguity plagues the church's account of the Spirit's relation to body which has significantly impacted certain church practices with regard to certain bodies. This conflicted history notwithstanding, the Spirit continues to seek and rest on bodies, and continues to liberate and renew bodies. In this section we shall take a look at how the concept of embodiment was formulated in Christian tradition by the Church Fathers. Of particular interest to us here are the perspectives of St. Irenaeus of Lyons and St. Augustine of Hippo with regard to the place of body and hence, difference, in the divine economy.

3.3.1 St. Irenaeus of Lyons

St. Irenaeus from Smyrna (ca. 135–ca. 200) studied at Rome and later became the bishop of Lyons. His theology is said to bridge the gap between Eastern and Western churches. His teaching on the Spirit is understandable, among other things, within the framework of his refutation of certain tenets of the Gnostic phantasmagoric complexity as he outlined in the greatest of his works whose significance and purpose is indicated by the title: *The Refutation and Overthrow of the "Knowledge" Falsely So-Called*

(popularly called *Adversus haereses*—Against Heresies). Embracing the exaggeration of oriental Platonism, the Gnostics taught that matter was intrinsically evil. Since for them the good God could not be closely associated or come into direct contact with matter which is evil, then material creation as presented in the OT could not have been the handiwork of the same good God of the NT. Rather, matter emanated from “*spirit*,” a displaced Eon – Demiurge, the Craftsman of the material world. Consequently, the idea that Christ, for instance, or even a human being who is thought to compose of spiritual or divine aspect, should possess a real, material body was repugnant to the Gnostics. Thus, they separated the Savior, Christ from the Jewish messiah Jesus and held that Christ only appeared to be human while his body was merely illusory.¹³² Again, consonant with their repugnance and contempt for matter, the Gnostics maintained that human body precisely as material cannot be saved anchoring their position on a misapprehended Pauline teaching that “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor 15:50). It is in the light of these basic Gnostic beliefs that Irenaeus’ theory of recapitulation¹³³ and atonement, and the sharing of the human body in the fruits of the redemption through the communication of the Spirit become comprehensible.

Basically, Irenaeus teaches that Adam and Eve in the prelapsarian state were

¹³² Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, I. 27, 2 (henceforth, *Her.*).

¹³³ The Irenaeian concept of recapitulation from the Greek *anakephalaiōsis* expresses the idea that Christ sums up or reconstitutes in himself the true Adamic humanity and not otherwise in order to redeem it. Christ as head (*caput*) is the one in whom everything in heaven and on earth including humanity, is reconstituted, reconciled, and restored. There is little doubt that this Irenaeian concept anticipates Origen’s theory of *apocatastasis*—the restoration of all things to their original state, a concept that clearly forms the organizing framework for Origen’s theological enterprise.

created by God like children (in the sense of spiritual childhood and immaturity).¹³⁴

Although they were created immortal, God nevertheless, set them certain limitations, so that should they keep God's commandments, they were to remain immortal and destined for perfection which they had to actualize through divine pedagogic and incremental stages within time and space.¹³⁵ Irenaeus makes a subtle distinction between the image and likeness of God in humans. He holds that the body of Adam created from the ground and infused with a soul was fashioned in the image of God. It, however, requires the spirit from God in order to be in the likeness of God. Thus the communication of the Spirit of God to humans makes them complete. When Adam sinned, all humanity sinned underlining the solidarity of the human race with Adam as its head. In order to redeem human beings from the bondage and death caused by Adam's disobedience, every dimension of Adam's humanity has to be taken and summed up completely in the new Adam, Christ (recapitulation)¹³⁶ in his incarnation to restore the solidarity of the human race with its new head.¹³⁷ Adam's disobedience estranged humanity from God. The Fall caused the loss of the Spirit for both Adam and his progeny. For restoration and renewal toward perfection, Irenaeus believes, Adam, and indeed, creation, needed the hospitality of God to open up such possibilities. Christ, thus, restored humanity to God by becoming

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, III. 22; *Dem.*, 12.

¹³⁵ *Dem.*, 15; *Her.*, V. 23, 1-2. For Irenaeus, human beings were created immortal in the prelapsarian situation and death was not part of that state until the disobedience to God through the deception of the Apostate, Satan (see *Dem.*, 16). Irenaeus, thus, rejects the idea that the creational limitations set Adam by God imply mortality and violence as a way of counteracting Gnostic repugnance and abhorrence of time and matter.

¹³⁶ *Her.*, V. 1, 2.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, V. 14, 2.

the same Adamic flesh. But unlike Adam who lost the Spirit, Christ the new Adam possesses the Spirit in full measure by which he permeates, vivifies, and sanctifies the whole human race, and communicating the same Spirit to humans through his obedience to the point of death.¹³⁸ Irenaeus thus insists strongly on the true and full humanity of Christ the Redeemer as opposed to the docetic stance of the Gnostics.¹³⁹ It is through the communication of the Spirit that humans become spiritual and thus empowered to share in the life of God and to achieve communion with God through the exercise of free will. The Spirit hence gives life to bodies that are destined for communion and relationship with God. Thus, the God of redemption is one and the same as the God of creation

Irenaeus emphasizes human freedom and insists that the mark of human equality is the gift of free will that makes humans responsible for their ultimate destiny. Indeed, he identifies the image of God in humans with the freedom of the will.¹⁴⁰ This idea of freedom Irenaeus contrasts with the more fatalistic tenet of the Gnostics who divided humans into three categories or grades: the spiritual, the psychic, and the material. According to this deterministic approach, only the spiritual have hope of salvation; the psychic are salvageable but in a diminished form; the material are doomed to perdition. Hence, Irenaeus contends that St. Paul's "spiritual" people in his letters refer to those who freely accept Christ, receive the Spirit, and thus become spiritual and have life because they allow themselves to be led by the Spirit. For "where the Spirit of the Father

¹³⁸ *Dem.*, 31 .

¹³⁹ *Her.*, V. 1, 2.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, IV.37, 4.

is, there is a living man,”¹⁴¹ Irenaeus argues. While those who choose to live without Christ are carnal because, destitute of the Spirit of God, they are dead and not having life, cannot possess the kingdom of God.¹⁴² It is those given to carnal lusts,¹⁴³ Irenaeus notes, which the Gnostics failed to understand as the flesh and blood that will not share in the kingdom of God, according to St. Paul. However, those who are spiritual do not dispose of their body; the communication of the Spirit does not vaporize their body.¹⁴⁴ It is the entire person; body, soul, and spirit that is spiritual. Accordingly, it is those who are spiritual, those who have received the Spirit that are made for salvation, since “without the Spirit of God, we cannot be saved.”¹⁴⁵ Therefore, salvation involves the whole person. For the perfect man is not merely a part of man but “the comingling and union of all the constituent parts, that is, body, soul, and spirit.”¹⁴⁶ According to the famous Irenaeian Imagery, the Spirit is one of the two hands¹⁴⁷ with which God fashioned us in creation and wrought our redemption. If the body would not be saved, then it would not have been created in the first place and the Word of God would not have become flesh.¹⁴⁸ God creates in order to save and that includes the body.

Again, Irenaeus argues, “If the flesh is not capable of salvation, man is not

¹⁴¹ Ibid., V. 9, 3.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid., V. 9, 1.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., V. 8, 1.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., V. 9, 3.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., V. 6, 1.

¹⁴⁷ See Ibid. IV.pref. 3, xiv.1, xxxiv.1; V. i, 3, v. 1; V. 6, 1; *Dem*, Introd. 51; *Dem*. 11.

¹⁴⁸ *Her.*, V, 14, 1.

redeemed, because flesh is an essential constituent of his nature.”¹⁴⁹ While arguing for the immortality of the soul, Irenaeus, however, appears to hint at a subtle relative corporeity of the soul. This hint is captured in his description of the soul as having “the figure of a man” (*hominis figuram*). The soul possesses this *figuram* of the body fitted to it just as water to a vessel.¹⁵⁰ Consequent upon this *figuram* and as opposed to the Gnostic theory of transmigration following Plato, the soul, Irenaeus teaches, utilizing the parable of Dives and Lazarus, continues to exist without passing from body to body; it retains the same bodily *figuram* in which it was originally fashioned, so that they (both soul and body) are able to know and recognize each other in the next world “and to remember the things which are here.”¹⁵¹ Importantly, nevertheless, Irenaeus distinguishes that the soul is immortal by nature while the body receives immortality only as an extrinsic and gratuitous gift after its dissolution or transformation from corruptibility to incorruptibility.¹⁵²

Besides, Christ’s resurrection and the seal of the Spirit constitute the guarantee of the resurrection of our own bodies. Counteracting the separation by the Gnostics of the man Jesus who is capable of suffering from the Christ who cannot suffer, Irenaeus argues for the unity of the Savior who recapitulates in himself the whole humanity. Anchoring on Paul, Irenaeus contends that if the Spirit of him who raised Christ from the dead dwells in us, he who raised Christ will give life to our mortal bodies (cf. Rom 8:11). The

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., IV. pref. 4.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., II. 19, 6.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., II. 34, 1.

¹⁵² See Ibid.

Gnostics appeared to be so preoccupied with the frailty and corruptibility of the flesh that they eliminated from view the power of God made manifest in weakness as Irenaeus suggests. For if God, Irenaeus contends, “does not vivify what is mortal, and does not bring back the corruptible to incorruption, He is not a God of power.”¹⁵³ The flesh, like the grain of wheat which when sown in the earth decomposes before it increases, is sown in weakness in death but made alive in power. Rising through the instrumentality of the Spirit, the flesh becomes a spiritual body, so that by the Spirit it possesses perpetual life.¹⁵⁴ With this imagery of the wheat, Irenaeus puts the idea of the resurrection and salvation of the body in close relation with the Eucharist.¹⁵⁵ The wheat which is the fruit of the earth becomes, through the Word of God, the Eucharist, the body and blood of Christ. When we partake of the body and blood of Christ, it is preposterous that we would not, like Christ’s own body itself, be raised to immortal life.¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, Irenaeus hinges on the Pauline imagery of temple to argue that our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit and members of Christ, are destined for salvation and resurrection.¹⁵⁷ As our bodies are the members of Christ, we will then naturally share in all that belongs to Christ including the resurrection of the body.

Moreover, another significant aspect of Irenaeus’ doctrine of recapitulation is the idea that he gleans from Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians 1:10 on the recapitulation and

¹⁵³ Ibid., V. 3, 2.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., V. 7, 2.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., V. 2, 3.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., IV.18, 5.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., V. 6, 2; cf. 1 Cor 3:16-17; 6:15.

reconciliation of all things in heaven and on earth in Christ. Irenaeus suggests that whereas the things which are in heaven are incorporeal, the things on earth are corporeal and find their synthesis in the human being. Christ therefore, recapitulates in himself all things “by uniting man to the Spirit, and causing the Spirit to dwell in man.”¹⁵⁸ Christ who created all things and is inherent in all creation was in the last times made flesh and hung upon the tree that he might sum up all things in him-self.¹⁵⁹ Clearly, Irenaeus’ theory of recapitulation which stresses the decisive importance of embodiment and the salvation of the flesh has a more robust cosmic ramification as this salvation includes the renewal of the whole creation. Thus, Irenaeus’ understanding of salvation as accomplished through the Spirit’s instrumentality holds great significance for ecology since all creation is interconnected and interrelated via corporeality. This affirmation of the goodness of the body and the material world as destined for salvation constitutes Irenaeus’ holism. All in all, the goal of Irenaeus has been to establish that the essence of the incarnation, life, passion, death, and resurrection of the Savior was the reconciliation and union of humans with God through the communication and restoration of the relational Spirit lost by Adam’s disobedience to human beings. This is because, without the Spirit, humans have no life since the Spirit is itself the life of those who receive it.¹⁶⁰ And humans who are perfectly alive because they possess the Spirit are the glory of God; hence the import of the timeless Irenaeian mellifluous dictum: *Gloria Dei, vivens homo* which means “the glory of God is the human being fully alive.” The relational Spirit is

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., V. 20, 2.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., V. 18, 3.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., V. 7, 1.

truly the Giver and Sustainer of abundant life.

Irenaeus' theory of recapitulation which entails the summing up of the whole human nature, the restoration of the Spirit of communion, and the reconciliation of all things in Christ with its cosmic ramifications is well taken. Nevertheless, I take an exception to Irenaeus' stance that those who are not members of the body of Christ's Church have no share in the Spirit. Irenaeus is, undoubtedly, pushed to this position because of his limiting the Spirit to the Church which for him appears to be the only means through which the Spirit as the pledge of immortality is communicated:

For where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church and every kind of grace.... Those, therefore, who do not partake of Him, are neither nourished into life from the mother's breasts, nor do they enjoy that most limpid fountain which issues from the body of Christ; but they dig for themselves broken cisterns out of earthly trenches, and drink putrid water out of the mire....¹⁶¹

The Irenaean axiom, *ubi Spiritus Dei, illic ecclesia, et omnis gratia*, seems troubling. If the Spirit of God blows wherever she wills as Irenaeus concurs, then it appears to be somewhat contradictory to at the same time limit the operations of the Spirit to the boundaries of the Church as Irenaeus seems to suggest. If the pervasive and uncontrollable Spirit makes possible the ever presence of God passing by, God always coming in a trace and drawing near especially in the most unexpected of places and persons, then the uncontrollable Spirit makes grace (understood simply as God's free and gracious self-gift, self-donation, or self-communication) available to all human beings even outside the boundaries of the church. In the words of John Paul II, the "mysterious

¹⁶¹ Ibid., III.24, 1.

working of the Spirit who, blowing where he wills...comes to and involves every person living in this world.”¹⁶² As Johnson rightly suggests:

Every personal encounter of God with human beings occurs in the Spirit, and it is in the Spirit that people make their response. This presence of the Spirit is a power and a joy, an outpouring and a gift. It is not controllable by any institution or community but is effective beyond the confines of the church, bringing forth fruits of holiness in people who do not partake of Christian word and sacrament.¹⁶³

Irenaeus’ position is tenable but to the extent that the understanding of church is more expansive (beyond institution) and drastically revised along the lines of a robust pneumatological perspective. The Spirit is no property of the church and the living God is not simply the Christian God; He is also the God of all humankind and even of those whose way of life, cultures, customs, and perceptions of the good and true are unlike those of Christians’. There is no one community or person that enjoys a monopoly of the Spirit, and no institution can lay claim to an exhaustive possession and control of the pervasive and uncontrollable Spirit since she blows where she pleases. Indeed, the mystery of the living God cannot be limited to the Christian God. This overabundance of God made available by the pervasive and uncontrollable Spirit which is experienced in other distinct settings and religions should be allowed to create a leeway for a more expansive understanding of church and new catholicity.

3.3.2 St. Augustine of Hippo

If Irenaeus’ theological endeavor with regard to the Spirit, body, and salvation, *inter alia*, significantly influenced and paved the way for later Eastern theological

¹⁶² John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae, The Gospel of Life* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995), § 77.

¹⁶³ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (New York and London: Continuum, 2011), 162.

currents especially those of the Cappadocians, Augustine's did the same in the West. No doubt, the perspectives of St. Augustine (354–430), bishop of the North African city of Hippo, proved most influential in the formulation of Western theological trends with regard to the Spirit within the overarching framework of Trinitarianism. Since Augustine's views on corporeality and the Spirit are interspersed within his vast literary lexicon, we shall here adopt, as a helpful criterion, to plumb his perspectives in what may be understood as the early and later Augustine.

Early on in his career, the reading of Cicero's *Hortentius* inspired Augustine with the love of philosophy.¹⁶⁴ By happenstance, he followed the Manichean dualistic beliefs which, among other things, conceived of a cosmic conflict between good and evil principles¹⁶⁵ and that all material reality is evil and the handiwork of an evil god. For the Manichees, the true and good God has nothing to do with the material universe which is evil but rather presides over a spiritual realm. Manicheans equally held that the real self is the inner self which is spiritual waiting to be liberated from the entrapment of the body at death. Disappointed at some point, however, with the Manichees, Augustine reverted to Neo-Platonism¹⁶⁶ which would influence his philosophical and theological perspectives after his conversion to Christianity in 386. After he became a Christian, the early Augustine rejected the Manichean belief that matter was evil and rather affirmed the goodness of the material world including human bodies brought into existence by the one and true God. Refuting the Manichean dualistic account of evil, Augustine conceives evil

¹⁶⁴ Saint Augustine, *Confessions* (London and New York: Penguin Classics, 1961), VIII. 7.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, VII. 2.

¹⁶⁶ See *Ibid.*, esp. III; V; VII.

as having no being, as a privation¹⁶⁷ since whatever has being is good and originates from the true God who is not only good but is Goodness par excellence.¹⁶⁸ Augustine argues, therefore, that evil issues from that empty and aberrant human desire (*libido* or lust)¹⁶⁹ and will in its sinful choice to turn away from God the immutable and ultimate Good and to turn toward temporal and lesser goods—intermediate goods—in Augustine’s pointed terminology.

Unlike Gregory of Nyssa, who held that our sexually differentiated human bodies were a temporary expedient which will become unnecessary in the resurrection, Augustine affirmed the goodness of bodily difference to be preserved even in the hereafter.¹⁷⁰ According to Gregory, our sexual difference became expedient as a result of humanity being created in the image of God which entails freedom (as in Irenaeus) and hence, mutability as well as the possibility of the abuse of freedom through disobedience to God’s commandments. Since the consequence of sin would be death, in order to preserve humanity from extinction, God in his foreknowledge created male and female as a biological reproductive mechanism to preserve the human race as long as the condition

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., VII. 12.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., VII. 3.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., VIII. 5, 6. Here, Augustine employs the imagery of “chain” to explain the dynamics of the phenomenology of human evil. Evil issues from the human lust for lesser goods and a misdirecting of the will away from God from whom all created things have their goodness. Every decision to love the intermediate more than the ultimate good, that is, every decision to keep giving in to lust begets habit and when such habit is not resisted, it in turn gradually births necessity. Every lust that becomes a habit, therefore, adds a link to the chain that fastens a person in the duress of the servitude to sin. This situation leads to a tragic understanding of sin in which the sinner is powerless before the irresistible and overwhelming power of sin. Sin becomes a tragic addiction in relation to which the sinner helplessly lacks the potency to resist.

¹⁷⁰ Augustine, *The City of God*, 22.17.

of sin lasts. Gregory's position, in other words, is that there would have been no need for sexual difference, were there to be no sin, and therefore, there will be no need for it after the resurrection.¹⁷¹ Augustine diametrically differed with Gregory.

Augustine's encounter with Pelagianism, however, caused a shift of emphasis in his apprehension of human free will as the index of being created in the image of God. The British ascetic, Pelagius, had stressed moral optimism in the role of human effort through obedience to achieve salvation. Contra Pelagius, Augustine rather stressed the radical depravity and vicious corruption of the human free will (originally capable of avoiding sin—*posse non peccare*) emanating from the sin of Adam and Eve “after which neither they nor their posterity could avoid sinning (*non posse non peccare*).”¹⁷² In other words, the human will in the wake of the Fall no longer possesses any effective volitional power of its own to will the good via its own unaided natural capacity since the irresistibility of sin surpasses and wrecks the power of the will. For Augustine, therefore, Pelagianism undermines the fact that salvation cannot be *achieved* by human effort and autonomous free will under the condition of sin but can only be *received* as the free gift of God's grace. To argue otherwise is, according to Augustine, to maintain “that human beings saved themselves.”¹⁷³ But the good news, for Augustine, remains that “the graciousness of God's redeeming grace depended on its being absolutely unconditional

¹⁷¹ See Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Humankind*, XVI; XVII, cited in *Constructive Theology: A Contemporary Approach to Classical Themes*, ed. Serene Jones and Paul Lakeland (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 87-8.

¹⁷² Cited in *Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 91

on human work or merit.”¹⁷⁴ In this way, the later Augustine modified his earlier understanding of the natural power of the free will to which he had attributed the capacity for both good and evil.

Having rejected one of the tenets of Manichean religion that God was a bodily substance and so somehow extended, and therefore, corruptible (a belief that he wrestled with for a long time), Augustine came to acknowledge that God is a spirit, thus immaterial and incorruptible.¹⁷⁵ Since God is Spirit, communion with God must be a spiritual rather than a physical reality. Consequently, Augustine identifies the image of God in human beings with the soul,¹⁷⁶ without discounting the goodness of the created order in general and the human body in particular.

After having identified the image of God in human beings with the soul or mind, Augustine in a further effort to articulate what communion with God entails, relates it to the rational faculties of the soul: memory, understanding, and will. The memory, as Augustine notes, in remembering its object, not only understands and knows itself, but by the same token also loves the object of its knowledge and becomes one with it. Augustine uses this psychological imagery to illustrate the presence of the Trinity in the soul. Memory stands for the Father; understanding for the Son, and will for the Spirit. The Father knows the Son He begets and the Son knows the Father who begets him and their reciprocal love (or gift) which they give to each other is the Spirit.¹⁷⁷ Conceiving the

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, III. 7; V. 10; VII.1, 4.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, VII. 9.

¹⁷⁷ Augustine, *The Trinity*, 9. 1-12.

Spirit as both the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son, Augustine surmised that the Spirit is their unity or communion. Hence, the Spirit comes to be known as the *vinculum amoris* (bond of love) between the Father and the Son.¹⁷⁸ The Spirit is thus the principle of communion and relationality. This Augustinian position was pressed to service in medieval Catholicism to emphasize the procession of the Spirit from both the Father and the Son which culminated in the addition of the *Filioque* clause (“and the Son”) unilaterally by the West to the Creed.¹⁷⁹ At any rate, the life of the Spirit and communion with God for Augustine is not merely a life of the flesh but an interior life cultivated in a journey toward God.

In the light of this journey toward God, what has come to be known as the “ascent motif” in the later Augustine assumed prominence. Consequently, the “life of the mind rather than the life of bodies together [that is, the full human being as a complex unity] became the chief analogy for God’s life, and as a result the body often seemed distant from Spirit’s life.”¹⁸⁰ Indeed, in accounting for human journey toward God within the confines of history, the pertinent metaphor Augustine employs is *peregrinatio* which

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 6. 7.

¹⁷⁹ The addition of the *Filioque* clause was for Western theologians meant, among other things, to protect the New Testament witness that God’s Spirit is equally the Spirit of Jesus since whatever belongs to the Father also belongs to the Son (see Jn 14:16-17,26; 15:26; 16:7-8, 12-15; Mtt 10:20; Rom 8:9, 11; Gal 4:6). The Spirit here viewed as the “commonness” between the Father and the Son is so construed in order to preserve divine unity. Indeed, post-Augustinian theology in the medieval flowering of scholasticism almost relegated the Spirit to speculations about the unity of the inner life of God. Eastern theologians and others, however, view this as an unbalanced emphasis on unity at the expense of Trinity leading to a subordination of the Spirit to Christ while insisting on the Father as the only source of deity in the Trinity. Interestingly, summing up the effect of the *Filioque* on Western pneumatology, Alasdair Heron insightfully suggests: “No longer does he [the Spirit] ‘blow where he will;’ rather, ‘it goes where it is sent.’” For more detail see Alasdair I. C. Heron, *The Holy Spirit* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983), esp. 87-98.

¹⁸⁰ David H. Jensen, “Discerning the Spirit: A Historical Introduction,” in *The Lord and Giver of Life: Perspectives on Constructive Pneumatology*, ed. David H. Jensen (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 12.

entails living out one's time in the world like a stranger without attachment to it. While not necessarily shunning the goodness of the created order, bodiliness, and other worldly concerns such as order, power, civilization, and so on, the life of the Spirit, for Augustine, reorients them to God as the Good that truly satisfies. As Peter Brown puts it, those who belong to the city of God, for Augustine, "are set apart by a holy yearning for the heavenly Jerusalem."¹⁸¹ The life of the Spirit in this yearning for the heavenly Jerusalem is to draw humanity into the eternal dance and fellowship of the Trinity. Augustine's concern for the spiritual clearly overshadows every other consideration.

Augustine's thought as elaborated above is well taken. Nevertheless, his apparent construal of history as merely a place of marking or living out one's allotted time in *peregrinatio* runs the risk of promoting an attitude of stoical endurance of the evils and sufferings of this life including, perhaps, those emanating from injustice, be they ecological, economical, political, socio-cultural, religious, and so forth, rather than to resist and confront them. This objection is strengthened all the more when it is realized that Augustine's androcentric projection of the normativity of male nature has proved very influential in promoting patriarchalism and the diminishment and exclusion of women in the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁸² Moreover, Augustine, to be sure, subtly grants that human freedom and responsibility are not annihilated by grace. However, his view

¹⁸¹ Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California, 1969), 323.

¹⁸² Augustine, for example, holds what strikingly appears contrary to the biblical account of the creation of male and female fully in the image of God in Genesis 1:27, when he asserts that "the woman, together with her husband, is the image of God," but apart from him, "she is not the image of God." See *The Trinity*, 7. 7, 10. Because women, unlike men, according to this Augustinian construal, do not possess the image of God in the full sense of the term, then women are considered to be more vulnerable to sin and indeed, as those who lead men to sin and therefore, to be avoided if one wants to advance in piety and union with God. There can be little doubt that this Augustinian anthropology sustains the evil of sexism, even today.

that salvation is received by sheer grace still risks rendering inconsequential and vacuous the role of human decision within the matrix of space and time in shaping ultimate human destiny.

Without pretending that the two Patristic figures we have considered in any way exhaust early Christian reflections on difference, it is sufficient that they represent significant influences in both the East and the West. It is clear that our bodies as symbols and bearers of our differences matter to God. As indwelt by the relational Spirit, what happens to these bodies of ours touches God since God has also taken body through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. In what follows then, a rethinking of the dignity of difference seems pertinent.

3.4 Rethinking the Dignity of Difference

Certain people especially among oppressed groups have been wary of any attempt at reclaiming difference for fear that such will continue to re-inscribe the assimilationist description of “otherness” by the so-called privileged group. Such fear is, indeed, reasonable and well taken since the assimilationist construal of difference has continually been used as a ploy to legitimate cultural imperialism as well as the oppression and exclusion of those marked out as “different.” Nevertheless, it does not stop us from still probing the question of difference which remains a social and historical given that we cannot simply shy away from. In this section, I attempt to sketch a certain understanding of difference that will help us reclaim the dignity of difference. But before we go further, let us revisit how difference has been overtly and somewhat continues to be covertly constructed.

As I suggested in Chapter 1, the kind of rationality espoused by the eighteenth-

century European Enlightenment up to the nineteenth- through the early twentieth-century modernity with its purported claim to universality and neutrality inevitably led to the exclusion and devaluation of some groups as savage and degenerate. Descartes had bequeathed to modernity a philosophy founded on the canon of mathematical style axiomata and scientificity. The intrinsic rationality of this modern science and philosophy is that whatever cannot be clear and distinct under the gaze of the *cogito* as the rational knowing subject is said to lack epistemic status. This Cartesian *cogito*, this rational subject as knower, is projected “as a self-present origin standing outside of and opposed to objects of knowledge—autonomous, neutral, abstract, and purified of particularity,”¹⁸³ as Iris Young writes. Thus, the Cartesian modern scientific and philosophical heritage constructs a discourse of “modern subjectivity by fleeing from material reality, from the body’s sensuous continuity with flowing, living things, to create a purified abstract idea of formal reason, disembodied and transcendent.”¹⁸⁴ According to the Cartesian distinction between mind and body, it is only the mind that can be the matrix of clear and distinct knowledge since it lacks extension and hence fallibility which characterizes bodily senses and all material stuff. Distrustful of the fallibility of the senses, it is only with the eye of the rational mind, for Descartes, that one can see clearly. And “only what is seen clearly is real, and to see it clearly makes it real.”¹⁸⁵ Hence, the subjectivity of the rational subject alone becomes the privileged authority that decides what is to be taken as truth and knowledge.

¹⁸³ Iris M. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), 125.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

Beginning with Descartes, therefore, reason assumed a new signification in Western epistemological and scientific discourse different from what it used to be in ancient philosophy. Reason no longer includes practical and praxic rationality; intuitive and emotive faculties pale into oblivion. Rather, in modernity, reason has come to mean exclusively calculative thinking, instrumental reason, or technical rationality. This appears like the coming true of what Martin Heidegger's fear once was when he said that: "calculative thinking may someday come to be accepted and practiced *as the only* (emphasis original) way of thinking."¹⁸⁶ What I aim at here is not a rejection of the positive aspects, insights, and achievements of the Enlightenment and modernity. Neither is it an attempt to turn the clock back to pre-Enlightenment days. It is rather a critique that aims at eliciting the inherent reductionism of modern reason and its implications for the construction of difference.

Characteristic of the gaze of the *cogito*—the subject of modern calculative and scientific reason—is its normalizing propensity. The rational knowing subject who claims to be gazing from a transcendent, abstract, and neutral height, views every other reality including other humans merely as objects outside of itself. So viewed, they are to be measured, calibrated, and evaluated on the basis of the norm set by the subjectivity of the knowing subject. In this way, everything is subjected to the arbitration of subjectivity.¹⁸⁷ Thus the calculative thinker decides on the basis of his own norm—which becomes universalized—what is real and what is tenable.

¹⁸⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. John M Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 56.

¹⁸⁷ See Benedict XVI, "Faith, Reason and the University Memories and Reflections," in *Regensburg Lecture of the Holy Father* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2006).

Having articulated the lineaments and attributes of the Cartesian modern calculative rational subject, in what appears to be a crucial move, whiteness, masculinity, and class closely came to be associated with reason purified from the fallibility of matter and the senses as was espoused by later Western philosophers, anthropologists, sociologists, medical scientists, theologians, and so forth. By the same token, blackness, brownness, redness, femininity, and others, were identified with body, lacking in rationality and intelligence. Rationality was conceived to issue forth from body type and physiognomy. White European bodies and facial features became the norm, “the perfection of human form, in relation to which other body types were either degenerate or less developed.”¹⁸⁸ Because black bodies, according to the normalizing gaze, for instance, lacked rationality they were construed as ugly, deviant, degenerate, loathsome, violent, etc. Moreover, viewed as naturalized bodies bereft of rationality, black bodies were disproportionately eroticized, construed as having unbridled sexual licentiousness, immoral, childlike in mental simplicity, physically frail and diseased, lacking in self-control, and, indeed, abnormal.¹⁸⁹ It is in this way, as Young puts it, that “the dominant culture defines some groups as different, as the Other.... Dominant discourse defines them in terms of bodily characteristics, and constructs those bodies as ugly, dirty, defiled, impure, contaminated, or sick.”¹⁹⁰ Clearly, we can see how nineteenth- and early twentieth-century modern scientific and calculative rationality came to construct a discourse that lapsed into a medicalization and epidermalization of difference. Difference

¹⁸⁸ Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 128.

¹⁸⁹ See *Ibid.*, 128-9.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 123.

came to be viewed simply from the standpoint of physiognomy, biology, as physical appearance became indicative as to whether a person was a superior or inferior human being. There is no doubt that group oppression based on groups marked out as different has been and continues in some ways to be perpetrated in accordance with the normalizing gaze we have been considering. It is also this consideration that largely explains cultural imperialism; that is, how “culturally imperialist groups project their own values, experience, and perspective as normative and universal.”¹⁹¹ When the dominant cultures and privileged groups ascribe normality and universality to their perspectives, they presume to lose and transcend their own particularity and situatedness. Because members of the privileged group put themselves in the position of the modern scientific, detached, and neutral rational subject, they came to view their humanity and rationality as the authentic while others who are different were viewed as sub-human. There is no question that this modern philosophic and scientific way of constructing the discourse of difference “has come to have enormous influence and repercussions in modern Western culture”¹⁹² with regard to how it relates with those construed as Other contingent upon its normalizing gaze. The normalizing gaze of the purported detached rational subject which thematizes, objectifies, and totalizes the Other has profound and enduring consequences insofar as the infrastructure of its discourse continues to condition the ideology and psychology that support privilege, power, and domination.

What is crucial to note is that in contemporary culture, albeit the dominant discourse that structures privilege and oppression may have been outlawed in public

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid., 127.

policy, it has, nonetheless, assumed a subtler, more evasive, and delicate character. The construction of the ugly bodies of those considered as Other may no longer be a matter of conscious public discourse, it has, nevertheless, “gone underground, dwelling in everyday habits and cultural meanings of which people are for the most part unaware.”¹⁹³ Even though people are now unaware in terms of discursive consciousness, yet such construction continues to find expression in the unconscious fears fueled by bias (in Lonergan’s sense of the term), the habits of avoidance, and aversions for the despised groups as well as an apparently unconcerned attitude rooted in a routinized *habitus* toward the unjust structures that cause their oppression.¹⁹⁴ The sin of omission is a worse kind of sin.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, many people especially among the disadvantaged and oppressed groups fear to affirm that they are different from the dominant groups since such admission would simply be buying into the rhetoric and legitimization of exclusion of the Other. Put another way, they fear that any admission of difference would amount to a reinscription of subordination and oppression. While such fear and the danger are real, the fact of difference still remains a reality. It cannot simply be wished away. What is rather needed is a way of accounting for difference that does not lead to the exclusion and subjugation of the Other. Fundamentally, it is a truism that every human being irrespective of color, race, sex, class, religion, and ability, belong to the same taxonomy of common and full humanity with one human nature. Theologically,

¹⁹³ Ibid., 124.

¹⁹⁴ See Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

this one human nature, according to Christian confession and, indeed, biblical witness, is anchored on the fact that all human beings are created in the *imago Dei*. No human being is more human or less human than another. All human beings are rational and equal. Equality here should not, however, be understood to mean sameness in the sense that everybody has to be Caucasian, for instance, in order to be human. But then, the one issue that is often glossed over is that as created beings, every human being exists within a spatio-temporal milieu, and thus, within history. In the words of Heidegger, a human being as a *Dasein* (being-there, situated or located being), who we are, and not necessarily what (*quidditas*) we are, our experiences and perspectives, are shaped by our distinct social milieu, memory, temporality, and historicity. Again, language is the home of being. There is no such thing as universal language. One thing we cannot do, as Jonathan Sacks rightly suggests, “is place ourselves outside the particularities of language to arrive at a truth, a way of understanding and responding to the world that applies to everyone at all times.”¹⁹⁵ Language dwells in meaning. It is merely naïve and reductionist to equate a person’s physiognomical and biological features with the nature or essence of the person. Any such equation is tantamount to essentialism.

The trouble with warped discourse of difference is that on the basis of the essentialist or deterministic logic of identity, a dominant group arrogates to itself “the position of a norm, against which all others are measured.”¹⁹⁶ By positioning itself as a norm, the so-called dominant group fails to recognize the particularity, situatedness, and contextualized status of its own perspectives which it tries to universalize. This has been

¹⁹⁵ Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations* (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 54-5.

¹⁹⁶ Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 169.

one of the key Western assumptions that progress achieved through the workings of technical rationality, would homogenize societies, neutralize differences (which would come to be called “tribalism”), and create one monoculture, the culture of the West. In this, what fails to be recognized is that there can be no such thing as the “unsituated self divorced from constitutive attachments to family, friends, community and history.”¹⁹⁷ In other words, it is impossible to speak of any human being or social group who is context-free. Young is right to suggest that, “contextualized understandings of difference undermine essentialist assumptions.”¹⁹⁸

By trying to morph all into sameness, the dominant category renders those who are different invisible and hence easy objects of oppression and exclusion. But it is only because subjugated groups are able to stand up and positively affirm their group difference through, for example, protest and liberation movements, civil rights movements, and so on, that oppression and exclusionary policies together with the institutions that nurture them are counteracted. Essentializing the logic of identity also neglects the fluid character of identity. It forgets that even one person as a member of a particular group can inhabit multiple identities all at the same time. Indeed, both individual and group differences always cut across every social group. And so it is not about hard core dualistic and hierarchized opposition—white/ black, rationality/body, male/female, universal/particular, and so forth. There are always gray and overlapping domains when it comes to the question of identity and difference. Sacks captures this complexity very succinctly: “We are particular *and* universal, the same *and* different,

¹⁹⁷ Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference*, 57.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 171.

human beings as such, *but also* members of this family, that community, this history, that heritage. Our particularity is our window unto universality (emphases original)”¹⁹⁹ To ignore the reality of difference from a positive perspective is to deny the reality of who we are as persons. In a very fascinating fashion, Sacks writes: “Our very dignity as persons is rooted in the fact that none of us—not even genetically identical twins—is exactly like any other. Therefore, none of us is replaceable, substitutable, a mere instance of a type. That is what makes us persons, not merely organisms or machines.”²⁰⁰ “If our commonalities,” Sacks continues, “are all that ultimately matter, then our differences are distractions to be overcome.”²⁰¹

To be sure, however, our differences are neither distractions nor exclusive oppositions to be overcome. An alternative to understanding difference simply in an essentializing and stereotypical way is to construe it in terms of relationality. Reality is not merely constituted by dualism in terms of dialectic of opposition. Rather, the really real is constituted by relationality; it is a complex of interconnected relationships. As I have made clear in the previous chapters, it has been part of the burden of this work to demonstrate that relationality is the overarching characteristic of reality. When understood from a relational perspective, the fecundity of difference enriches parties engaged in an encounter in the spirit of openness and unbiasedness. This idea of openness in the encounter with the Other is crucial since there is something of a mystery in every human being and every social group. No one social group enjoys a monopoly of truth and

¹⁹⁹ Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference*, 56.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

knowledge. There is rather plurality in reality. To disregard this fact amounts to human hubris. Besides, it is also an attempt to keep nourishing the fear that renders impermeable the frontier between sameness and Otherness in order to sustain and continually defend privilege and domination. Perhaps this underlines Heidegger's summons to all to *releasement* and openness to the mystery.²⁰² The term *releasement* derives from the German word, "*Gelassenheit*" which connotes a certain sense of composure, calmness, or unconcern. The word also has to do with the idea of letting the Other be, letting the world go and giving oneself to God. Thus *releasement*, when understood within the context of relationality, entails recognizing and respecting the otherness of the Other, letting the Other be, and the opening of oneself to the Other in self-transcendence and reciprocity. Indeed, *releasement* and the need for openness of oneself to the mystery that the Other is, belong together. This is not to be delusional about the fear, risk, danger, and ambiguity that come with the interpersonal encounter between the self and the Other. But in order to be fully human with the Other, openness, embrace, and solidarity require the self to have the courage to deal with those ambiguities that difference yields. A relational understanding of difference is thus an other way of relativizing previously held universal and purported neutral objective positions of dominant global designs which are but particular, situated epistemologies and, therefore, for overcoming the exclusion and exclusiveness. In this way, domination and alienation would be jettisoned in favor of *releasement*.

Pneumatologically, as we argued in the foregoing section, the relational Spirit poured out on all flesh at Pentecost empowers all the inspirited to embrace a

²⁰² Heidegger, *Discourse*, 54-5.

transformation of imagination. Taking the challenge of relationality—embracing equality-in-difference in openness and solidarity—seriously would require a rethinking of attitudes toward those often excluded by us as Other. It would require revisiting and retrieving memory that keeps informing, most times surreptitiously, our histories, legacies, actions, aversions, and engaging it in truth telling in order to ascertain if and how such memory and imaginary may have been freeing some people while hurting those viewed as Other. Such memory and imagination need to be transformed in order to become more life-affirming. The liberating Spirit who resists and overcomes all life-negating structures ushers us into the pluriversality of the body of Christ for mutual enrichment and for witnessing to the reign of God. In the community of the inspirited, everyone, irrespective of social status, place of origin, language, sex, ability, culture, and so on, is recognized, respected, and has a place in the community. In that community, the Spirit empowers the powerless, makes the silenced native tongues of the margins to be heard, and sets them free from their suffocating situations to develop their own capacities and actualize their own destinies. It is this kind of Spirit enabled community that should be a sign of the reign of God to the world. When we say that we have been indwelt and inspirited by the outpouring of the Spirit, such a statement is fecundated with a profound theological import that has significant implications for ecclesial and social praxes. Through the outpouring of the Spirit, we become the body of Christ “and individually members of it” (1 Cor 12:27). Through the agency of the indwelling Spirit, Christ raises a body “for himself within humanity...through which the domain of Jesus’ body is extended.”²⁰³ If in the double epiclesis at the Eucharist we invoke the Spirit to transform

²⁰³ M. Shawn Copeland, “Body, Race, and Being,” in *Constructive Theology*, 97.

not only the bread from the earth but also us into the body of Christ, then the calibration and evaluation of bodies that lead to “the domination and reduction of human bodies”²⁰⁴ become theologically problematic. As Shawn Copeland aptly puts it, such constitutes “an insult to Eucharist.”²⁰⁵ Theologically, the inspirited human body becomes a site of divine revelation. The human being fully alive because enlivened and vivified by the life-giving Spirit becomes, in the language of St. Irenaeus, the glory of God. Again, in the words of Jesus in Matthew 25:40, whatsoever you do to these little ones who are my brothers and sisters, you do it to me. I am sure that it is because of words of Jesus like this one from Matthew’s text that Marianne Sawicki wryly and pointedly comments: “Jesus turns up in bodies other than his own.”²⁰⁶ Any refusal or exclusion of the Others because they are regarded as different by any group renders the Eucharistic *koinonia* an empty ritual. Emphasizing the importance of difference, Vladimir Lossky suggests that “the face of the Spirit is the assembly (*koinonia*) of redeemed human faces in their infinite diversity. Human persons grown to the fullness of their particular identities, but sharing in the common divine gift of reconciled life...are the Spirit’s manifestation.”²⁰⁷ Christianity is not innocent when it comes to the question of the denigration and desecration of bodies since it once supported and clearly crafted theological justifications to legitimate the enslavement of black and other bodies. This complicity of Christianity truly subverted the

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 98.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Marianne Sawicki, *Seeing the Lord: Resurrection and Early Christian Practices* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 264.

²⁰⁷ Cited in Rowan Williams, “Word and Spirit,” in *The Holy Spirit: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Eugene F. Rogers, Jr. (Malden, MA and West Sussex, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 64.

koinonia, the communion, and relationality through which the Spirit binds the members of the *ekklesia* to the Trinity and to the body of believers, and indeed, to all of creation. This instance and similar others illustrate a denial of the Eucharist. The liberating, reconciling, renewing power, and grace of the Spirit challenge and also help all who are used to oppressive proclivities to unlearn such, convert, transform their memory and imagination, and begin to embrace praxes that are life-giving and life-affirming.

This challenge is no more clamant than in contemporary times when what used to find expression in oppressive and exclusionary public conscious discourse has metamorphosed into hidden but practical unconscious habits, feelings, behaviors, cultural vocabularies, generalized media culture, and aversions for the degraded Other that simply appear to be normal because taken for granted. In other words, such practices are not a matter of the choices or actions of a few isolated individuals who are out to denigrate the Other; they have simply become, for that matter, unconsciously institutionalized. More so because such new guises subtly evade the reach of law and public policy, it requires a socio-historical and critical analysis and description like the kind we have been pursuing in this section in order to get to the root of the matter. That such transmuted practical discourse exercises significant influence with far-reaching effects on the denigrated Other today cannot be overstressed. On the other hand, it is often the case that those who have been oppressed and so devalued for such a long time tend to come to internalize and introject their devaluation and unconsciously understand themselves through such prism.²⁰⁸ Such imagination also needs transformation that will engender the revaluation and revalorization of the dignity and agency of the denigrated bodies. It is such

²⁰⁸ See Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 165.

imaginings and collective negative social memories that need to be interpellated, unmasked, named, and transformed so that difference will no longer be construed for exclusionary but for mutual enriching purposes. Considering the need for proper transformation and *senatio in radice* of the said imaginings, we shall, in the next section, take a look at a broader understanding of the concept of sin and evil.

3.4.1 Broadening the Concept of Sin

Through the centuries, the dominant trend with regard to the understanding of sin in Christian thought has focused on the individual as the sinner. This particular understanding of sin is not unconnected with the idea of the traditional elements that come into play in order for sin to occur. They include, among others, intention, knowledge, and free choice. There is also little doubt that the Adamic account of sin (see Gen 3:1ff) would have contributed immensely to the development of a juridical and privatized notion of sin. Sin becomes a transgression or disobedience against God's law in relation to its concomitant punishment. Moreover, it is easier to ascertain at the individual level the constituent elements that go into the making of sin in order to impute culpability. Hence, sin has most frequently been conceived solely as a matter of evil and morally questionable choices located within the will of an individual who, consequently, stands guilty before the judgment of God. Going by this construal, the experience of evil has most often been viewed as the punishment for sin. It is in this light that the whole idea of the practice of penitence and penance—to heal the wounds and undo the punishment due sin—which overly concentrates on the individual in much of Roman Catholic tradition becomes understandable. It is not my intention here to undervalue, still less deny the reality of the individual sinner as the locus of responsibility for sin and evil

since fundamentally it is the individual who, by and large, makes morally sinful choices. For without such recognition, it becomes even more difficult to apprehend the possibility of receiving grace, conversion, and acceptance of God's mercy. Rather, it is my judgment that the overemphasis and preoccupation with individualized understanding of sin (though it preserves personal responsibility) eliminates from view other significant aspects of sin especially the tragic dimensions of the horrendous injustice that the selfish and unregulated greed and choices of certain groups cause to others on our planet. In individualized view of sin, those sinned-against as victims and the massive evil caused to them do not often enter the picture. More often than not, the very fact of victimhood is not actually and truly acknowledged. It is not hard to understand the reason. Since the perpetrators of massive evil do not suffer what their victims, the sinned-against, suffer, they cannot imagine the anguish involved. Thus, only the victimized is qualified to speak about what it feels like to be sinned-against. Truth here is rooted in practical reason and in the verifiability of the historical praxic experience of suffering bodies in unjust situations. It is this truth that reductionistic instrumental reason always tends to jettison as irrational. Part of the call to conversion on the side of perpetrators, is thus to be open to listen to the victims in order to learn the concrete truth of what it means to suffer.

Individualized or privatized notion of sin and evil is, therefore, to my mind, narrow and perhaps has, for that matter, caused a neglect of the question of the impact of massive evil, the undeserved suffering, anguish, and massive destitution brought upon the sinned-against. It is true that everybody is a sinner, that is, no one is sinless. But that does not negate the fact that everybody has not sinned equally and that some groups of people

are simply innocent victims of evil “forces largely beyond their control.”²⁰⁹ The distinction between perpetrators and victims is crystal clear. Sin basically as an offence against God is an offence that at the same time is inseparable from an offence against neighbor. However, certain sins are primarily against neighbor. The sin and evil of insatiable and unregulated greed which drives the engine of market capitalism which of necessity creates inequalities, for instance, results in sin against love of neighbor and not primarily an issue “of personal or professional morality in direct relation to God.”²¹⁰

Sin may be personal but it is never individualistic. It is also social and structural or systemic. The social dimension of sin, according to Bernard Häring, entails some “sort of solidarity in corruption.”²¹¹ In his 1984 Post-Synodal Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia, Reconciliation and Penance* (hereafter, RP), Pope John Paul II painstakingly labors to explain the distinction between personal sin and social sin. While admitting the reality of social sin, John Paul II suggests that ultimately, such cases of social sin are nothing but simply “the result of accumulation and concentration of many personal sins.”²¹² Put another way, social sin is merely an aggregate of many personal sins. For him, then, social sin is nothing but:

a case of the very personal sins of those who cause or support evil or who exploit it; of those who are in a position to avoid, eliminate or at least limit certain social evils but who fail to do so out of laziness, fear or the conspiracy of silence, through secret complicity or indifference; of those who take re-

²⁰⁹ Darby Ray, “Tracking the Tragic: Augustine, Global Capitalism, and a Theology of Struggle,” in *Constructive Theology*, 137.

²¹⁰ Sallie McFague, “Sin, Evil, and Economics,” in *Constructive Theology*, 148.

²¹¹ Bernard Häring, *Sin in the Secular Age* (London: St. Paul Publications, 1974), 112.

²¹² John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia, Reconciliation and Penance* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1984), §16.

fuge in the supposed impossibility of changing the world and also of those who sidestep the effort and sacrifice required producing specious reasons of higher order. The real responsibility, then, lies with individuals.²¹³

Understandably, part of his reason for this position is to avoid the possibility of attributing responsibility to an anonymous or generalized system or structure. Another factor is because of his conviction that sin “is always a personal act, since it is an act of freedom on the part of an individual person and not properly of a group or community.”²¹⁴ Even though John Paul II concurs that both external and internal conditioning factors and influences “may attenuate, to a greater or lesser degree, the person’s freedom and therefore, responsibility and guilt,”²¹⁵ he, nonetheless, insists that the individual remains free. He fears that any disregard of this fact in order to blame external factors like structures, systems, communities, for individuals’ sins, detracts from the freedom and hence the dignity of the person. To crown it all, he argues that an institution, a structure, or a society cannot be the subject of moral acts. Consequently, an institution, a structure, or a situation cannot in itself be good or bad. That is to say they are morally neutral. While John Paul II’s fears are genuine and his position well taken, there still remains something troubling about such position. To ascribe neutrality to certain institutions for fear of diminishing personal freedom and responsibility is to gloss over the evil inherent in such institutions by their very nature. Let us take, for an example, the institution of slavery with its structures which caused unprecedented suffering including the uprooting and dislocation of African slaves in Europe and the

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

Americas. Such an institution and other social structures like colonialism (and neo-colonialism by their very nature cannot be said to be neutral, neither morally good nor evil. Without any circumlocution, I dare to say that such institutions by their very nature were and remain a crime against humanity wherever and whenever they existed or still exist. Dehumanizing by their very nature, they are essentially evil. Such institutions qualify as structural evil as they were even legitimated by law and given theological, religious, and ecclesiastical sanction as well as philosophical justification.²¹⁶ They were not merely the result of the accumulation or aggregate of many personal sins but an institutionalized violence that incarnated as normalization at the time. Any disregard of the massive evil caused by such horrendous institutions to their innocent victims jeopardizes the prophetic task of unambiguously calling evil by its real name and for what it is and more so, of naming who is creating it. In this case, it is about denouncing, for example, the institution of black enslavement as evil and unmasking the perpetrators as Europeans and Americans because all Europeans and Americans whether personally guilty or not benefitted from the said evil institution. The same logic applies to global neoliberal imperialistic capitalism. All in the global North who benefit from it whether knowingly or unknowingly, directly or remotely, including the churches, are implicated in the massive poverty that is unleashed on the two-thirds world, especially, Africa. The

²¹⁶ During the early part of the nineteenth century certain missionaries to Africa seemed to recognize the criminality and illegality of the institution of slavery and sought for ways to atone for the wrongs of the slave trade in view of the harm done to Africa. However, while such move was being made, one English clergyman, the Rev. Thomas Thompson, who at the time in question had served as a missionary in West Africa, ironically produced a work in defense of the institution of slavery, backing up his stance with philosophical (especially Aristotelian) and biblical (especially Pentateuchal) authorities. See Thomas Thompson, *The African Trade For Negro Slaves Shown to Be Consistent With the Principles of Humanity and the Laws of Revealed Religion* (London: CMS, 1772), cited in Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture Upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Oxford, U.K.: Regnum Books International, 1999), 254n19.

relational, liberative, and resistant Spirit challenges both society and church of the North to listen to and learn from beyond its borders.

John Paul II seems to understand this fact. For, somehow, he veers toward this direction without actually going there. I said this because in underscoring the unfailing holiness of the church, John Paul II recognizes that for the church to be an authentic witness and agent of reconciliation, it has to be mindful of its own failings and the constant need of purification, penance, and renewal.²¹⁷ As he clearly puts it: “for, by reason of her sins, sometimes “the radiance of the church’s face shines less brightly” in the eyes of those who behold her.”²¹⁸ What is meant by this statement: “by reason of her (the church’s) sins?” Does this refer to the personal sins of the church’s individual members? Or is it about the corporate sins of the church as a corporate entity? Or is it about both? While this statement might be riddled with confusion and unclarity, it is not difficult, at any rate, to know where John Paul II stands on this. With regard to social sin in relation to the church, his position would definitely be that the sins of the church are nothing but the aggregate of the personal sins of its individual members. For he strongly avers: “Whenever the church speaks ... or ... condemns as social sins certain situations or the collective behavior of certain social groups, big or small...she knows and she proclaims that such cases of social sin are the result of the... concentration of many personal sins.”²¹⁹ John Paul II also grants that “social sin can be committed either by the

²¹⁷ See Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (hereafter, LG), 8, in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, vol 1, rev. ed., ed. Austin Flannery (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1988).

²¹⁸ John Paul II, *Reconciliatio*, §12; cf. “LG, 39; Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 4.”

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, § 16.

individual against the community or by the community against the individual.”²²⁰ What is unclear in all this is how a social group as an entity may engage or participate in massive evil and sin. The sins of the church may, therefore, not simply be limited to the personal sins of its individual members or, for that matter, to the concentration or accumulation of the personal sins of members but also to the work and whole life of the church as an institution including the decisions and actions endorsed by the official church and carried out in its name.

By the way, it had to take over half a millennium, precisely in 1992, during his papal visit to Senegal (to one of the ports from where slaves were shipped out of Africa) for John Paul II to confess on behalf of the church and to ask Africans, to forgive the church for its collusion and participation in the enslavement of Africans. The church is not merely a collection of individuals who compose it. It is also an organization, a body with a life of its own which is not merely an agglomeration of atomized disparate individuals. It is an organism, a body in which members exist through a spiritual and mystical relatedness and bonding such that it is described as a *koinonia* or communion. Because it exists as a body through relatedness, whatever happens to one part has an impact on the rest. Thus, it is as an organic entity that the church can participate in sin through its practices, policies, and even translations (which might be ideological and so sometimes create situations of injustice, exclusion, oppression, and suppression through the wielding of the coloniality of power).²²¹ In December 1999, the International

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ See, for example, the bull of Pope Nicholas V, *Romanus Pontifex* (1454) in which he gave the king of Portugal a monopoly in trade and exploration along the west coast of Africa; he authorized in the same bull the enslavement of Africans and the subjugation of Muslims in the name of the church.

Theological Commission issued the document, *Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past* (hereafter, MR). MR aimed at providing a theological foundation for the “purification of memory” as one of the signs that may help people to live the exceptional grace of the celebration of the Jubilee Year 2000 with regard to resentments stemming from the legacy of past faults of the church.²²² What is worth noting, however, is how the central focus and tenor of this document lean heavily toward reconciliation with God and hence the glorification of God. No doubt, the document makes reference to reconciliation with other humans (referring to Matt 5:23-24 where Jesus asked the offender to go first and be reconciled with his brother before bringing his offering to the altar), particularly those victimized by past injustices.²²³ Yet the treatment of such reconciliation in MR is consistently underemphasized and subordinated as a by-product of reconciliation with God. To be sure, only God can absolutely forgive. However, numerous biblical passages press home the point that reconciliation with God is achieved by seeking reconciliation with one’s fellow humans first. The prophet Isaiah, for instance, clearly insists that the worship pleasing to God is predicated upon the outreach to victims of socio-political, cultural and religious injustices (see Isa 58:1-12). Similarly, according to John, whoever claims to love God but hates his brother or sister is a liar, “since no one can love God whom he cannot see if he does not love his neighbor whom he can see” (1 Jn 4:20). Therefore, reconciliation with fellow human beings whom we have hurt and victimized is a necessary condition for reconciliation with God.

²²² International Theological Commission, *Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past* (December 1999), “Introduction.”

²²³ Ibid., § 2.2.

A common link between MR and RP is its emphasis on social sin as always “the result of the accumulation and concentration of many personal sins.”²²⁴ MR goes on to say that “Sin is therefore always personal, even though it wounds the entire Church, which, represented by the priest as minister of Penance, is the sacramental mediatrix of the grace which reconciles with God.”²²⁵ Again, while maintaining that one can only speak of social sin by way of analogy, MR deduces that “It emerges from this that the imputability of a fault cannot properly be extended beyond the group of persons who had consented to it voluntarily, by means of acts or omissions, or through negligence.”²²⁶ The *fundamentum* of this position is still the idea of personal sin which entails knowing and willing consent. But this position remains really disturbing. What if those group of persons who had consented voluntarily did so not in their own names but in the name of an institution (sociologically understood, like the church), is it not the church that bears the blame? Moreover, the argument that the imputability of a fault cannot be extended beyond the group of persons who consented to it does not really seem to hold water since the church as an institution outlives individuals and groups of persons who act on its behalf. Individuals and groups come and go but the church remains and whatever wrongs committed in its name remains associated with the church. The church is to be held accountable for those wrongs committed in its name whether or not the group of persons who consented to them are still around or not. By this, I do not mean personal sins of individual members of the church of which they go to confess to the priest. I am talking

²²⁴ Ibid., §1.3.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

about wrongs or evils officially sanctioned and legitimated by the church and backed up with official theology. Is this just the accumulation of the sins of individuals? For such wrongs against whoever may be the victims, the church as an institution takes responsibility and imputability regardless of whether or not the specific actors in the name of the church are still there. As if this is not yet enough, the document intriguingly states that, “only when there is moral certainty that what was done in contradiction to the Gospel *in the name of the Church* by certain of her sons and daughters could have been understood by them as such and avoided, can it have significance for the church of today to make amends for faults of the past (emphasis mine).”²²⁷ But it is arguable that the church of today does not emerge from the vacuum. Its contours are shaped and informed by the traditions and legacies of the church of past generations which it has inherited including the good and the ugly, and of whose story it has become a part (by way of common memory). The church of the present continues the legacy of the colonality of power of the church of the past. There may be no purification of memory without acceptance of responsibility. If memory is the faculty that brings the past into the present, then we accept that that past is a part and parcel of our story whether the actors in the past are still around or not. In a certain sense, the church of the past is still the same church of the present. There is continuity. If the church of the present does not accept that memory, then what are we purifying? We can be held responsible without necessarily being culpable. As a matter of fact, the real problem we have to deal with in our world today is, perhaps, not so much about what has been done by people who knew they were doing

²²⁷Ibid., § 4.

wrong as about what has been done by people who were convinced they were right.²²⁸

The worst crimes, massive evils, and egregious injustices committed against humanity have all probably been executed by people who were convinced they were doing the right thing. Nazism, colonialism, slavery, the Spanish Inquisition, and the burning of heretics at the stakes are a few examples. Sadly enough, in all this talk about personal sin and imputability, the innocent victims of the effects of other's sins are left out of the equation that seems to be more interested in ascertaining moral certainty. Sin is not just sin; it attacks and ruptures relationships. It undermines the relationality that characterizes reality. It is of utmost importance to acknowledge the experience of the victims, affirm the harm done to them irrespective of whether the specific actors in the name of the church are still extant or not, and then look into the structures and attitudes that supported and perhaps continue to perpetuate the harm and change them, and make amends to restore the sense of dignity and equality of the victims.²²⁹ Real healing is inseparable from justice. The call for the healing or purification of memory and reconciliation cannot be a calling of victimized peoples, groups, persons, religions, nations, and so on, simply "to conform to the pattern of the...dominant group doing the calling [and defining what that purification means]. There is no way to heal from violence...brokenness, [exploitation] if the injustice that caused the...[harm] is not also addressed."²³⁰ There is need to go to the root of the matter without cosmetizing and rationalizing over moral

²²⁸ See Kekong Bisong, *Reception as a Theological Determinant* (Enugu, Nigeria: SNAAP Press, 2005), 142.

²²⁹ See *Ibid.*, 138-43.

²³⁰ Letty M. Russell, *Just Hospitality: God's Welcome in a World of Difference*, eds., J. Shannon Clarkson and Kate M. Ott (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 112.

certainty when in the meantime, those mistreated are still carrying the burden and wound of the wrongs done to them.

Another point that is often eliminated from view when sin is limited to individualized sins is what I have already hinted at above. It is about the normalization and powerful sedimentation of ways, attitudes, behaviors, cultural vocabularies and idioms which not too infrequently prove influential in the formulation of policies which ultimately end up denigrating and insidiously making victims of some social groups regarded as “Other.” Such practices, as noted in the preceding section, are not simply a matter of the choices or actions of disparate individuals. Neither are they about the concentration or accumulation of disparate personal choices or actions. These have simply become institutionalized and normalized ways of causing violence and oppression to others. Such social structures, even as they grant the enjoyment of unprecedented privilege and power to those who live within them, they have become “so subtle and complex, so intertwined with commonly held assumptions about human nature and the good life, as to be nearly invisible”²³¹ to those who participate in them. That explains why, among other things, it is crucial that structural evil requires cultural healing; a healing of the collective imagination and social memory bank, and calls for corporate acts of *metanoia*, not only of individuals but also of social groups whose ways of living (inordinate consumerism, for instance), policies, ideologies (be they economic, political, or religious) make victims of others through oppression, suppression, domination, deprivation, financial slavery, or even death. All, albeit, are sinners, but all do not sin

²³¹Ray, “Tracking the Tragic,” in *Constructive Theology*, 135.

equally. Those who have privilege and advantage thrust upon them by the unjust socio-economic systems and the coloniality of power in which they are embedded; and who enjoy the fruits of global neoliberal market capitalism, for instance, which at the same time brings untold suffering and destitution to the vast majority of the globe; are on all counts greater sinners than those who only suffer the experience of its horrendous injustice. This kind of sin is not directly against God but the neighbor. What needs to be stressed is that God's solicitude is not merely directed toward the one who sinned directly against God but more so to innocent victims, the poor, the oppressed, because they suffer the evil of the sins of perpetrators and oppressors. Genuine conversion, *metanoia*, and purification of memory, therefore, requires that we pay an intense and profound attention to the effects of our sins on those sinned-against in order to change our ways. The irrepressible and resistant Spirit confronts all unrighteous power relations and challenges all in power—civil or ecclesiastical—to self-criticism and to learn from the victims. As the Johannine Epistle makes clear, anyone who claims to know and love God but is lacking in neighborly love is a liar (see 1 Jn 2:4; 3:15; 4:20; cf. Jn 8:54; Jas 1:27); for such people suppress the truth and only cling to the image of God of their own fabrication, which is idolatrous. Indeed, the witness of Scriptural evidence abundantly attests to the fact that it is neighborly love that proves our love for God.

What strikingly emerges from the foregoing is that it is pertinent to unmask, assess, and name evil in its personal, social, and structural dimensions in order to engage it. It is an effort to put into relief the difference between oppressors and the oppressed. This task involves what Gayatri Spivak calls “strategic essentialization.”²³² As an

²³² Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography,” in *The Spivak*

approach, strategic essentialization allows one to name evil in a definitive way especially within specific social and political contexts in order to strategically mobilize the agency of the oppressed and those cut off from power equation to engage and resist such specific tyranny. One of the goals of strategic essentialization is to stress the need of recognizing that some people are actually and truly oppressed and hence are innocent victims. This recognition should lead to a move to end the cycle of violence and victimhood which have more often than not been eliminated from perspective in individualized or privatized view of sin and evil. Such recognition will, no doubt, help victims—who most often introject and place the blame for their victimization on themselves—in their healing process. Besides, such acknowledgment would cushion victims and enable them to overcome the dangerous temptation to revenge and/or replicating the sin and evil that has been visited upon them.

This task also calls for the healing and transformation of memories and imagination (I shall deal with this issue later). Since social structures are always mediated through private lives, social change will always go hand in hand with personal *metanoia*. As a matter of fact, structural transformation is an index and verification of authentic, profound, and abiding personal conversion. The fact that institutions and ideologies that perpetrate massive evil are human creations, the argument of inevitability is neither sustainable nor defensible. They can always be transformed. Things can change and an alternative world is always possible. Genuine and deep conversion, therefore, calls for human solidarity, solicitude, and responsibility for the neighbor. The neighbor is not

Reader, ed. Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean (New York: Routledge, 1996), 213-14, cited in Margaret Kamitsuka, "Sin and Power: Poststructuralist and Post-colonial Theories," in *Constructive Theology*, 157.

necessarily the one who is like us as the parable of the Good Samaritan reveals. No doubt, through the Creator, life-giving, and relational Spirit, God has made every person in His image. The life of every human being indwelt by the living Spirit of God is equally important to God especially the plight of the defenseless poor and oppressed. Yet, in that same image, each of us is different. The challenge to our social and religious imagination then is how “to see God’s image in one who is not in our image”²³³ and still love him or her. It certainly calls for openness to the Spirit who effects a change of heart (see Jer 31:31). Nowhere is this challenge more evident in human intersubjectivity than in the question of hospitality to the stranger, the one who is different, not quite like us. In the next chapter, I shall deal with the framework of hospitality as a model for negotiating the boundaries of difference and of living out in concrete terms the communion and relationality inspired and made possible by the life-giving, liberative, and relational Spirit.

3.5 Conclusion

We have demonstrated in this chapter that the Lord and the Giver of life is truly the relational Spirit. This fact has been illustrated with evidence from biblical, Patristic, conciliar, magisterial, and other contemporary theological resources. The lordship of the life-giving relational Spirit is comprehensible within the matrix of creation and liberation leitmotif. Thus, the Spirit not only gives life and provides for its flourishing, but also interpellates all life-negating forces by being on the side and in solidarity of the marginalized, oppressed, and exploited. In a world of differences, the relational Spirit challenges all perpetrators of massive evil who make victims of others to self-criticism

²³³ Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference*, 60.

and conversion to the love of neighbor which is inseparable from the love of God. It is the life-giving and liberative Spirit who makes communion and relationality necessary for building an alternative world possible.

Chapter 4

The Relational Spirit and Hospitality/Friendship: Negotiating the Boundaries of Difference

4.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter we articulated the need for acknowledging the dignity of difference (which itself is a gift of the relational and Creator Spirit). What remains to be worked out is a framework that would allow us to negotiate differences in a way that is at the same time transformative and enriching. This chapter investigates the model of hospitality/friendship as a suitable framework for negotiating the boundaries of difference in a mutually enriching way; and as a way of living out the imperative of the Spirit who enables the overflow of God's abundant hospitality to the world.

I will first and foremost clarify the meaning of the term hospitality, the reason for its choice as a preferable model, and the key elements that constitute it. The next section will focus on the deformations of hospitality and friendship. Here, I shall expose certain notions that appear as hospitality but in actual fact, are not. We shall do this particularly in conversation with Aristotle. In what follows, the question of hospitality will be investigated in conversation with two key postmodern philosophers, Emmanuel Levinas and particularly Jacques Derrida's take on the impossibility of hospitality. We shall then use the insights of decolonial thinking especially, of Walter D. Mignolo, to problematize the Eurocentric bent of deconstructionism. This leads us to an examination of the ritual of welcome among the Etche as one instance of the enactment of hospitality in a historically concrete situation that allows for the emergence of the voice of the excluded outsider.

Furthermore, this takes us to the treatment of hospitality as a liberative imperative of the Spirit. As the one anointed by the Spirit, Jesus embodies and enacts the liberative hospitality of God by bringing release to the oppressed and suppressed. The climax of his hospitality is in the complete gift of himself in the Eucharist which, in turn, becomes a gift and a task for the church. Finally, our awareness of the eschatological tension in which we abide helps us to understand that unlimited hospitality especially as accomplished in the Eucharist, remains an eschatological ideal and a lure toward which Christians strive proleptically in hope of its fulfillment while working now for justice and peace in the power of the Spirit. The model of hospitality, we will conclude, remains a preferable framework for articulating an African theology that will usher in the social transformation of Africa in an age of globalization.

4.2 Hospitality/Friendship: Preliminary Clarifications

Taken in a broad sense, the word hospitality expresses a set of relationships and encounters between hosts and guests. The guest could be known, invited, and expected/unexpected or a totally uninvited and unexpected stranger who simply arrives. My interest here lies in understanding hospitality as a religious concern for the stranger. From the outset, hospitality to the stranger should be understood as a model for negotiating the complexities, ambiguities, and the sometimes difficult eddies surrounding difference and identity as well as one way (not the only way) to respond to the challenges posed by difference. As amply demonstrated in the preceding chapters contemporary understandings of relationality underscore that identity is discovered in difference. In keeping with such understandings, it becomes clear that as human beings, we are able to delineate our identity by our ability “to distinguish what is other to ourselves, what is

irreducible to our own needs and wishes.”¹ On this note, Edward Farley is right when he writes, “If we cannot get outside the circle of our [own] autonomous [narcissistic] interests and desires, we will experience only reflections of ourselves.”² This is very important considering that our local context (Nigeria) is a space that is inhabited by multiple religious and ethnic identities, as well as other configurations that call for what decolonial thought describes as border thinking and pluriversal existing (I will explain this later).

Let me now talk a little bit about who a stranger is in order to focus our discussion of hospitality and friendship. A stranger is someone considered not an insider but an outsider defined by his/her difference which, in any case, does not make the person less equal. A stranger is that person who is not like us and so viewed as not one of us. S/he is regarded as a foreigner, an alien. Precisely as an alien, a stranger is that person who does not share the cultural patterns, traditions, narratives, religion, and history of an unfamiliar world that is being approached or encountered. The unfamiliar space approached is one where the stranger is without a home. Found in the uncanny and the unhomely with no supporting networks,³ the stranger is one who approaches an unfamiliar turf where s/he may or may not be welcomed.

Ordinarily, the world of home can be said to be the space where the host inhabits a settled existence. The import of hospitality to the stranger may not be clearly

¹ Edward Farley, *Deep Symbols: Their Postmodern Effacement and Reclamation* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1996), 57, cited in Lucien Richard, *Living the Hospitality of God* (New York and Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2000), 1.

² See Ibid.

³ See Luke Bretherton, *Hospitality as Holiness: Christian Witness Amid Moral Diversity* (England/Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 139.

understood without an appreciation of the significance of home. Lucien Richard fascinatingly employs a cluster of qualifications or markers to elucidate this significance. According to him, “Home is a safe place; it is an affective place. It is a community in which communion should exist; it is habitable.”⁴ The home, Richard goes on, “describes...the place where I belong, where I have rights and obligations. ...Less simply a space than a place of intensity, of emotional energy, ‘home is where the heart is.’”⁵ Furthermore, “to be ‘at home’ implies familiarity, mutuality, respect, security. It means that communication with one another and understanding of the other can follow established patterns. In the home reality is predictable; the ‘other’ is not an abstraction.”⁶ Just as the notion of the stranger implies the idea of an outsider/insider, so also the notion of home is laden with the idea of an inside and an outside. This understanding of home brings to the fore the category of boundary which makes possible the distinction between inside and outside. As Richard suggests, “Within our boundaries there can be domestic peace; outside, life can be dangerous and hostile. At the same time that the inside offers comfort, it also offers a chance to communicate with ‘neighbors’ and their living spaces. Boundaries of human living need not be exclusive.”⁷ An ideal home which necessarily incorporates the idea of a house is one which not only has windows through which its inhabitants can only look outside but also a door (or doors) through which they can go out and let others come in as well.

⁴ Richard, *Living the Hospitality of God*, 7.

⁵ Ibid., 7, 8.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 8-9.

Richard's description of the notion of home as more or less a stable entity, a safe and affective place within whose boundaries domestic peace is guaranteed but beyond which there can be insecurity, precariousness, conflict, and hostility, is well taken. Understandably, Richard seeks to affirm and accentuate the positive and humane aspects of the notion of home inside of which is "the space of a pure domesticity, if there is such a thing."⁸ Albeit, he grants that boundaries need not be exclusive, his description, however, eliminates from view the sometimes internal dynamics of ambivalence, ambiguity, and conflict which take place even within the interior borders of the home itself. It is here that postcolonial theoretical approach becomes germane. To state the matter differently, the home space is not merely a stable and ordered space of pure domesticity and solidity, a space where reality is always predictable, and a place where interface with others always follows established patterns and orderliness with emotional and communal securities guaranteed. That the home space is characterized by such ambivalence finds expression in Michael Nausner's recognition of the fact that "it was in the familiar surroundings of his home town Nazareth that Jesus met his first real death threat (Luke 4:21-30)."⁹ For the purity of the home traditions and assumptions, even insiders who dare to be different may sometimes be oppressed and treated like outsiders.

With regard to friendship, while it is part of human nature to engage in friendship, it is not always the case that people are friendly. To forge the bond of friendship takes time and testing through various circumstances. Friendship entails a "willingness to place

⁸ Michael Naas, *Taking on the Tradition: Jacques Derrida and the Legacies of Deconstruction* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003), 166.

⁹ Michael Nausner, "Homeland as Borderland: Territories of Christian Subjectivity," in *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire*, ed. Catherine Keller, Michael Nausner, and Mayra Rivera (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2004), 124.

our life and needs in the hands of another.”¹⁰ This means that the process of getting to know someone in prospect of opening authentic friendship requires vigilant efforts (translating, interpreting and reinterpreting each other’s actions and attitudes over a period of time) in order for mutual trust to come about. Friends never enter into a relationship from a presuppositionless position. Friendship does not dissolve the individual differences of those in a relationship. Rather, when authentic friendship has been established, friends learn to transcend their individual selves to seek what transcends them in the relationship: the truth that none possesses in its fullness. Hence, authentic friends are not afraid to engage their distinct histories and experiences through conversation in order to enrich themselves with the truth which is personal and without one party imposing on the other, his or her own epistemic stance as some neutral, abstract, universal, and unlocalized phenomenon. This also implies the possibility of disagreement on issues without stopping them from being friends. Where authentic friendship with openness to mutual trust exists, the parties involved would realize that there is something deeper in relationship (which is not self-serving) that goes beyond their individual desires; something that calls for self-dissipation for one’s friend. Such a realization would be helpful to friends in devising a paradigm or mechanism for sustaining a relationship even when they disagree. By extrapolation, this means that we can also be friends to those who do not agree with us and who may not necessarily be our friends. We can live together, coexist and inhabit the same space even if we do not agree.

Friendship, undoubtedly, has its own temptations. Friends, for instance, might

¹⁰ David B. Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 3.

become too familiar with each other that it becomes “increasingly difficult to speak the truth, as and when we see it, to someone with whom our life is intertwined.... Yet the demand to do so...never ceases. We can never claim to ‘have *the truth*,’ to fully know another, since our articulations of what we think to be the case are always up for revision (emphasis mine).”¹¹ Truth is not merely an assertion with a claim to universal rational validity imposed by one party on another. Alasdair MacIntyre has rightly reminded us that no one thinks and operates outside a certain given tradition or perspective. Therefore, “those who pretend to operate outside any tradition by claiming the ground of rational discourse are themselves guided by the tradition called ‘liberalism.’”¹² Indeed, it is legitimate to say that every thinking and every inquiry is always grounded and proceeds from some implicit and underground perspective held by the one doing the thinking or quest. Authentic friendship requires that each party be honest and be him/herself. Where honesty exists, even when out of human frailty a friction occurs in the relationship, friends with understanding would be able to seek avenues for reconciliation.

In friendship, genuine friends do not enter into a relationship from a position of self-sufficiency. Seneca, for instance, espoused the position that self-sufficiency is the condition of possibility for friendship.¹³ His view was formulated as a critique against the perspective that sees friendship as rooted in the need to compliment a lack in one’s life. Thus, for him, friendship is only possible between two people who have already attained

¹¹ Ibid., 22.

¹² Ibid., 4; see Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Whose Rationality?* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 1988), esp. chap. 17: “Liberalism Transformed into a Tradition.”

¹³ See Seneca, “On Philosophy and Friendship,” in *Other Selves: Philosophers on Friendship*, ed. Michael Pakaluk (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1991), 120-1.

the abundance of virtues and are self-sufficient. In this way, they do not have any lack to fill out by each other; they are invulnerable and unaffected in the relationship since friendship simply becomes a leisure affair. Friendship so conceived does not allow for any mutual enrichment; there is no expectancy since each of the parties does not stand to learn anything from one another because each is already self-sufficient. That this type of mindspace (self-sufficiency) continues to guide the Catholic church's relation to other religions today even with all the hullabaloo about interreligious dialogue is obvious, as we shall see in the next chapter.

The fact that we can still be friends even to those who disagree with us or are unlike us links friendship to hospitality which is extended to those outside the inside of the borders of the home turf. This brings us to a subtle and tenuous distinction between a frontier and a border. Hispanic theologian, Roberto Goizueta, has beautifully silhouetted the contours of "the Frontier myth" which is rooted in the desire to "construct" an "other." Tracing the myth back to its British colonial antecedence, Goizueta locates its most explicit articulation in American history as synthesized by the American historian, Frederick Jackson Turner in what today is known as the frontier thesis:

American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion...with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character. In this advance, the frontier is the outer edge of the wave – the meeting point between savagery and civilization....¹⁴

¹⁴ Cited in Roberto S. Goizueta, "Christ of the Borderlands: Faith and Idolatry in an Age of Globalization," in *Religion, Economics, and Culture in Conflict and Conversation*, The Annual Publication of the College Theology Society, vol. 56, ed. Laurie Cassidy and Maureen H. O'Connell (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2010), 186. Cf. Frederick J. Turner, *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner*, with commentary by John Mack Faragher (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1994), 32, 60.

Clearly, a crucial characteristic of the frontier is to extend, to expand, to dominate, to seek new opportunities, to conquer, especially the purported region of savagery that lies outside the frontier. The frontier today instrumentalizes neoliberal capitalist economic and market forces (globalization), as well as political and not infrequently, military might to achieve its goal. The frontier characteristically constantly moves outward and strongly resists every movement from without into it viewed as tantamount to uncivilization. Construed as the meeting point between savagery and civilization, Goizueta rightly interprets the frontier as “an idol, and that, like all idols, it generates victims”¹⁵ always to justify its own innocence much in tune with René Girard’s mimetic and scapegoat theory.¹⁶ By generating victims and passing the bulk as a way to maintain its own willful innocence, the frontier then does not have to bother to deal with the egregious evils and injustices that are embedded at the core of its own social order and power. The interior frontier of modernity with its myth of progress and expansion of civilizing mission couched in hubristic logocentric global designs; its claims to offer to the so-called savages on its exterior boundaries the ideal of history, rationality, and of being human, amounted to the dislocation of the subalterns. Colonialism is often justified as something nobler rather than pure exploitation, oppression, repression, subjugation, and the silencing of the epistemological potential of the “outside.” What emerges from this is that colonial discourse and modernity’s instrumental rationality (which, by the way, is only a local rationality/epistemology) became universalized as the norm from which to gauge

¹⁵ Ibid., 192.

¹⁶ For more detail, see René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977); *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1965).

other rationalities or irrationalities. But to be sure, what truly lies hidden beneath the surface of this so-called myth of progress of modernity is the irrational myth of violence and barbarism of the hegemony of Western episteme. This type of discourse serves power as it is used to support the hegemonic reach of modern rationality, knowledge, and epistemology which at the same time suppresses or silences every other epistemic perspective at the margins. But if God who is transcendent also in his freedom gratuitously and radically reveals himself in the most unexpected of places, in Jesus from Nazareth, that place where nothing good comes from, then frontier by its very nature is preclusive of the possibility of a divine irruption, a revelation that impinges upon it from the “other side.” As Jesus declares in Matt 25: 34-40, the hungry, the stranger, the poor, the weak and vulnerable, indeed, the one from the “other side” constitutes the privileged *locus* of revelation. In this sense, it is clear that hospitality and friendship to the stranger, the vulnerable, and indeed to the subaltern, thus take on a cardinal theological significance.

In keeping with the above understanding, a frontier differs from a border. Accordingly, “A border is the place at which two realities, two worldviews, two cultures...[or plurality of cultures/worldviews], meet and interact.... At the border growth takes place by encounter, by mutual enrichment. A true border, a true place of encounter, is by nature permeable.”¹⁷ The border, like the threshold of a home, is not inside, it is the “in-between,” the limit space between inside and outside. Precisely as the “in-between,” it is the space of transition, the space where hospitality is extended to the

¹⁷ Justo González, *Santa Biblia: The Bible Through Hispanic Eyes* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1996), 86-87.

stranger who arrives. It is always from the border as from the threshold that doors are opened and arms are opened or extended to embrace and welcome. As the “in-between” and the place of transition, the border becomes, in the language of Walter Mignolo, the space of the “colonial difference” from where emerges “border thinking” which aims to unsubject and foreground silenced subaltern perspectives through intellectual decolonization.¹⁸ I will elaborate more on this and its significance for border inhabitation in a later section. A border becomes a frontier when it becomes impregnable or exclusionary and implacably harsh with only a totalizing agenda. What is needed is not a frontier that moves outward only in order to dominate, conquer, totalize, and subjugate the potential epistemic status of the “outside” because it lacks openness of being toward mutual relationship with others. Rather than a frontier that grows only by mere expansion outward, what is needed is a border, a meeting point where growth and/or enrichment is predicated upon genuine cross-epistemological interaction respectful of equality-in-difference. The boundaries of the home turf should be characterized as a border, a threshold where authentic hospitality is at the service of difference rather than a frontier which excludes and silences.

Before we proceed, there is need to attend to a further clarification on the reason for our choice of the model of hospitality/friendship rather than covenant in our effort at developing an African theology that is contemporarily relevant for the social transformation of Africa. Such clarification has become necessary in view of certain

¹⁸ See Walter Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), esp. part 1, chap. 1.

objections raised especially by Nigerian philosopher-theologian, Francis Njoku, against the use of hospitality model for grounding a relevant African Theology.

4.2.1 Hospitality Versus Covenant

In his essay, “Missiology Today: The African Situation,” Elochukwu Uzukwu had argued for the endurance of African hospitality in defiance of all cultural fragmentation emanating from colonial infiltration, technology, and modernity. Building on this observation, Uzukwu submits that hospitality, to the extent that it has abided, “it could be described as a way of being an African”¹⁹ and as the minimum a person expects from family and community. For Uzukwu, the hospitable attitude of Africans toward the stranger proves a fertile ground for preaching and receiving the Gospel. It is against this backdrop that he proposes hospitality as a model of inculturation. What must be carefully noted in this observation is that Uzukwu avoids essentialism by stating in no uncertain terms that hospitality is “a” way (not simply the way) of being African. This assertion should be understood to mean that hospitality constitutes an important aspect of African inhabitation; albeit, a unique characteristic of Africans, it is not exclusive to Africans as it is also uniquely shared by the rest of the world in their own unique ways. The reality of African hospitality should not, however, be dismissed or even trivialized on the grounds that it is after all a commonplace among peoples of all cultures as Njoku seems to suggest.²⁰ This commonality of hospitality should not eliminate from view the distinct

¹⁹ Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, “Missiology Today: The African Situation,” in *Religion and African Culture: Inculturation – A Nigerian Perspective*, ed. E. E. Uzukwu (Enugu, Nigeria: SNAAP Press, 1988), 158.

²⁰ Francis O. C. Njoku, “Some Indigenous Models in African Theology and an Ethic of Inculturation,” in *Essays in African Philosophy, Thought and Theology*, ed. Francis O. C. Njoku (Enugu, Nigeria: SNAAP Press, 2002), 246.

symbolic universes that ground, shape, and inform its practice in different regions and traditions. To be sure, as Njoku further notes, “there are records of brutality or hostility emitted to people outside of one’s clan.... The present state of affairs in the [African] continent could be all but hospitable to its citizens or strangers!”²¹ Yet it is arguable at the same time that hostility is not peculiar to Africans and to the African continent. Just like hospitality, inhospitality is also widespread across different regions of the world. You only need to read the newspapers or listen to daily news to confirm this fact. Njoku further opines that viewed through a critical lens, the so-called African hospitality may well be merely “a personal feeling of some good hearted individuals who are found in the various degrees in every culture amid the general attitude of suspicion shown towards strangers. So it (hospitality) may not be presented as a specifically or solely African cultural attitude or value.”²²

Njoku tends to ignore the fact that hospitality could be well practiced both on the individual and communal levels. In the case of the latter especially, certain distinct cultural and symbolic rituals guide its practice. Such distinct cultural symbols associated with the practice of hospitality must not be treated with levity. This is because every region is a historico-cultural and linguistic entity; and when a symbol is taken outside its original contextual universe and social location, its signification is either obscured and hence rendered unintelligible or completely obliterated. The seriousness of this matter in our time of increased linguistic, historico-cultural, and pluriversal consciousness can scarcely be overemphasized. This recognition must be taken seriously in order to avoid a

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

naïve simplification and/or conflation of the practices of hospitality in different regions by collapsing them under one common denominator. A people's contextual approach to hospitality with its undergirding symbols must be respected insofar as such symbols function not to dominate or prejudicially exclude but to welcome the stranger who arrives. Reality is never unmediated; nor unsituated. Indeed, nothing is unmediated. By the same token, hospitality as an aspect of reality, its commonplaceness notwithstanding, is never unmediated since it needs a particular historical place/space in order to be carried out. It is, therefore, needful to humbly and sincerely recognize the fact that all actual expressions of the enactment of hospitality are historically and culturally contingent and variable. Thus, the presence of hostility does not necessarily present a sufficient reason for reducing hospitality to the merely personal feeling at best or for peremptorily dismissing its reality at worst. After all, even individuals can also be hostile rather than hospitable to others. And quite unlike hospitality which has conventional rituals to shape its practice of welcoming the other, hostility does not have such recognized rituals. Thus while hospitality can be seen as a way of "being," hostility is not, even though it might irrupt intermittently due, partly, to the "structural situation of the created order—its materiality and temporality—" ²³ which implies that sometimes, there could be weaknesses and pitfalls in our relation to the other and in our ability to extend hospitality. Whereas as beings created in the image of God, as I have earlier on established in the previous chapters, we not only have the capacity for love, compassion, and empathy (*misericordia*) in our relationships with others but do actually practice and live these

²³ Hans Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), 35.

virtues as well. Yet as creatures inhabiting the postlapsarian dispensation, albeit, redeemed, we are still prone to finitude and fallibility.

Another area where Njoku takes issue with Uzukwu is in the latter's observation that although, the presence of a guest ordinarily portends a good omen but he/she could, depending on the circumstance, equally constitute "both threat and luck."²⁴ By this Uzukwu could be understood to mean that in the encounter between the stranger and the host mutual respect is expected. Should the stranger try to impose his/her message on the host with no due regard for the traditions and, may be, protocols of the host, then there is every likelihood that the stranger may face opposition, criticism, and possible rejection of his/her message. The idea of threat or opposition or rejection does not seem to augur well with Njoku. For him, hospitality is either an intrinsically "positive value"²⁵ or it is not. It cannot incorporate simultaneously both terms of "threat and luck" as expressed by Uzukwu. Njoku seems to understand the idea of opposition or threat as suggested by Uzukwu as an element of aggressiveness introduced into the metaphor of hospitality. For Njoku then, this amounts to a diminution of the notion of hospitality. At any rate, Njoku's fears and apprehensions are frankly understandable especially in view of his purely rationalistic and logical modality which sees hospitality to the guest as portending both threat and luck to be not only dualistic but also contradictory. But clearly, it is also true that life is larger than logic. It must be affirmed that Uzukwu's observation is realistic rather than merely idealistic. On this side of the eschaton, when the stranger abuses the hospitality of the host by disrespecting his (the host's) traditions or by regardlessly

²⁴ Uzukwu, "Missiology Today," 159.

²⁵ Njoku, "Some Indigenous Models in African Theology," 245.

imposing his perspective on the host, the likelihood of encountering opposition, criticism, or even rejection is a real one. This does not, however, take away or detract from hospitality which must not be abused. It must be kept in mind that the practice of authentic hospitality is not an effort in passivity. There is no question that authentic hospitality eschews totalization be it either on the part of the host or the guest. As Hans Boersma rightly affirms, “Hospitality rejects the violence of a totalizing imposition of oneself on the other, the violence that forces the other to be shaped into one’s own image.”²⁶ Therefore, in a number of ways, hospitality as an active attribute can also be an activity of interpellation of the proclivity of the host to thematize, homogenize, dominate, and totalize the stranger; it could as well be an imperative summons to the host to be open to responsibility and justice as “the essential precondition for gaining the truth.”²⁷ Yet authentic hospitality ordinarily demands that the guest respects and not dominate or impose his will on the host.

The fluidity inherent in the metaphor of hospitality warrants that one could be hospitable yet at the same time critical of the *status quo*. As Gerald Boodoo in a fascinating rhetorical move puts it: “Isn’t this one of the messages of the parable of the good Samaritan? The very act of kindness and hospitality by the Samaritan was a scathing condemnation of the religious and social context of the time. Hospitality then allows for welcome and participation as well as meaningful resistance and opportunities

²⁶ Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross*, 26.

²⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Interiority*, Nineteenth Printing, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 70ff.

for change.”²⁸ Hospitality must not be bastardized to take advantage of either the host by the stranger or vice versa. And because reality is never unmediated, therefore, neither the host nor the stranger has complete possession of *the truth* to be imposed on the one by the other or vice versa. This should not be seen as a form of endorsement of relativism. It should be noted that “Enlightenment presuppositions about truth and reason gave...[the very specter of relativism] its stature as a threat. For they presume a normative set of rational criteria available to all, against which any claim to other sets of criteria is utterly unsettling. That is what we mean by ‘relativism.’”²⁹ Rather, hospitality entails a way of saying that truth can only benefit from an atmosphere of respectful encounter with another³⁰ (which is not merely an intellectual debate in which there is a winner and a loser but rather an honest and humble “cross-epistemological conversation” à la Mignolo). This also means that when it comes to the question of hospitality, there may be no claims to any hard and fast boundaries characterized by solidity. Rather, where genuine hospitality is given, it renders boundaries pliant, permeable, and penetrable. Hospitality thus includes an element of uncertainty which has to be carefully navigated

²⁸ Gerald M. Boodoo, “The Person in Caribbean Perspective: Hospitality, Friendship, Gift” (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University, Unpublished Doctoral Seminar Reading).

²⁹ Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth*, 41.

³⁰ The Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, in 1991 issued the document, *Dialogue and Proclamation* which outlined four forms of dialogue with the other, particularly, the religious other. The fourfold forms are viz: (a) The *dialogue of Life*, where people strive to live in an open and neighborly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations. (b) The *dialogue of action*, in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people. (c) The *dialogue of theological exchange*, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other’s spiritual values. (d) The *dialogue of religious experience*, where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance, with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute (DP §.42).

via dialogue and deference. Hospitality helps us to understand that all human inquiry and thinking happen within a tradition. Hence, any claim to faith grounded in “pure reason” or abstract universal, is, at best, an illusion, and at worst, violence. What is required is for us to develop, through hospitality, the skills needed to navigate among the distinct traditions without totalizing any. The element of uncertainty in hospitality is, therefore, profitable to theology, and for that matter, African theology which remains faith constantly questing to understand as it seeks to penetrate the depth of Africans’ particular experience and confrontation with divinity in their own historical and social space. This questing of faith by its nature, progresses asymptotically.

In hospitality, the boundary is neither shunned nor simply transcended but rather transformed into a border, a space of negotiation, translation, and interpretation in the light of the stranger who approaches as an other center of epistemic enunciation. In hospitality, border is not erased. Rather it assumes a certain malleability, permeability, plasticity, and instability.³¹ The permeability of the border allows for its opening to enable subaltern perspectives to emerge. This kind of understanding is redolent with Homi Bhabha’s point that the place called boundary or borderline “puts us in the position of translating differences into a kind of solidarity.”³² The border is not a place for destroying but rather for affirming differences while at the same time allowing for a movement across differences through mutual encounter and interaction leading to growth, enrichment, and transformation in solidarity of others. Thus to be a boundary dweller entails an interstitial inhabitation of the “in-between” where identity is actually

³¹ Nausner, “Homeland as Borderland,” in *Postcolonial Theologies*, 125.

³² Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 170.

shaped by a multiplicity of factors and not necessarily in an essentialist fashion that gives the impression of a more solidity of identity than what is actually the case. On account of the numerous external influences that have always infiltrated and ultimately invented Africa as a forced reality particularly the experience of colonialism, it is plausible to submit that Africans are characterized by a border or an “in-between” inhabitation or dwelling. In this way, Africans, like other subalterns in the modern/colonial world system, inhabit multiple identities. However, it is only in keeping with such an atmosphere that the Gospel which is both transcultural and countercultural can effectively impact culture by interpellating and transforming those elements that are counter-Gospel. At the same time, the Gospel in turn is itself enriched and its dimensions expanded through rereading, translation, and reinterpreting in the light of such encounter with local cultures/epistemologies and situations of lived experiences.

By and large, in view of the objections raised, Njoku proposes the model of covenant in place of hospitality. He sees the idea of covenant as not the only feasible model but for now remains, nevertheless, the best for constructing an African theology of inculturation. To make his point, Njoku adopts G. E. MendeHall’s definition of covenant as a “solemn promise made binding by oath, which may be either verbal formula or a symbolic action. Such an action or formula is recognized by the parties as the formal act which binds the actor to fulfill his promise.”³³ Njoku briefly rehearses some of the biblical accounts of covenants ranging from simple ones between men to those between God and men, the people of Israel, and climaxing in the Eucharist. In all this, Njoku’s

³³ G. E. MendeHall, “Covenant,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible, A – D*, ed. George Arthur et al (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 714 cited in Njoku, “Some Indigenous Models in African Theology,” 250.

interest seems to focus on the idea of “oath” or “promise” which is binding on the parties involved in the pact to avoid occurrence of a breach. The oath makes the parties to be respectful and faithful to each other. Indeed, he sees the idea of the Hebrew *berith* which has the English equivalent of oath as analogous to the Igbo (African) idea of *Igba-ndu* which means mating or communion of life.³⁴ Through *Igba-ndu* which may involve the ritual process of blood drinking taking from and by both parties, “communion in the same life and meaning”³⁵ comes to be effectuated. In this way, Njoku underscores that the idea of humans as covenanted or existing in communal union is no stranger to the African experience. Indeed, Njoku minces no words in affirming that covenant making characterizes African mode of being. He goes on to aver that through such covenants, “even strangers come to see themselves as ‘blood relatives,’ thereby assuring the sacredness of all in a common paternity/maternity and brotherhood.”³⁶ For Njoku, this covenant model overcomes the prejudices and fears, and perhaps, the uncertainties surrounding the ethic of encounter which, accordingly, can only be nourished by life of communion and friendship.³⁷ Quite frankly, Njoku grants that even the covenant situation is not perfect or absolute since there abounds an infinite possibility for breaching it. But his conviction is that in the event of a breach, parties involved can “avail themselves of the infinite possibility of renewals, re-enactments and re-commitment to their initial

³⁴ Njoku, “Some Indigenous Models in African Theology,” 252-3.

³⁵ Ibid., 252.

³⁶ Ibid., 253.

³⁷ Ibid.

cause....”³⁸ To my mind, this observation of Njoku with regard to human limitations that frequently endanger relationships is key to understanding the import of *igba-ndu*. *Igba-ndu* (meaning binding life together) seems to be more meaningful when understood as the ritual renewal of already existing relationships but which have been broken or endangered by betrayal, neglect, or failure.

Njoku’s position is undoubtedly fascinating. There are many appealing features in his analysis of covenant. Yet it contains some troubling subtle nuances which need further critical exposition. But before proceeding, it is, however, pertinent to point out that every model always encapsulates reality from a particular perspective. Since no model or imagery pretends to be exhaustive, all models limp. At any rate, some models would be more significant than others in the sense that they are more illuminative of the issue at stake and more unifying of its multifaceted aspects into a holistic vision. Moreover, a model may be more relevant in a particular time and context than in another particularly in view of the signs of the times.³⁹ In an age of pluriversality and globalization, with the shrinking of the world into a smaller village and coupled with the ambivalence of interconnectedness and fragmentation which has heightened awareness of differences, I contend that the metaphor of hospitality remains a preference. This is so because, among others, hospitality is capable of transforming boundaries into an “in-between” space for negotiating difference and fostering solidarity with the stranger regarded as other in our contemporary time and context.

³⁸ Ibid., 257.

³⁹ See an interesting discussion on this by Anselm K. Min, “The Church as the Flesh of Christ Crucified: Toward an Incarnational Theology of the Church in an Age of Globalization,” in *Religion, Economics, and Culture in Conflict*, 95.

While there is little doubt as Njoku establishes that covenant is not only a biblical but also African motif (such as *Igba-ndu*), it is equally pertinent to argue that hospitality, in the first place, is the condition and possibility for covenant. Hospitality always precedes covenant. Before any talk of covenant, before alliance or agreement, a welcome, a recognition of the other, a hand is held out or spread out to embrace⁴⁰ the other, the stranger. Even in the case of the Sinaitic covenant, before making a covenant with Israel, God had to first of all show the people of Israel hospitality while they were strangers in Egypt. As strangers in Egypt, the people of Israel were the “other,” the subaltern, those at the margins and hence, the voiceless, and the silenced, and worst still, the oppressed and enslaved. Israel, of course, fared well initially in Egypt until a new Pharaoh breached the bond of friendship and subjected it to subaltern position. It was from such situation that the hospitable God liberated Israel before ever entering into a covenant with the people (cf Ex 2:23-25; 3:7-10). Before covenant, God first welcomed Israel as strangers. Indeed, God’s hospitality to the people of Israel which was a condemnation of the unjust social structures that pushed them to the exteriority of Egyptian frontier, preceded and paved the way for the Sinaitic covenant. It was there on the margins, in that subaltern location that God revealed his power to lift up the silenced and oppressed. Subalternity is also a place of speaking; it is also a place with epistemic potential, and indeed, a site of revelation. God’s hospitality and concomitant election is thus the foundation of his covenant with Israel.⁴¹ Actually, in accordance with the common ancient Near Eastern practice of

⁴⁰ For an illuminating discussion of the question of the “phenomenology of embrace,” see Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1996), esp. 99-165.

⁴¹ See Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross*, 18.

making treaties or alliances (especially suzerainty pacts), a brief chronicle or rehearsal of historical antecedents which serves as a prologue usually precedes the making of covenant commitments.⁴² It includes especially the deeds of benevolence and hospitality performed by the suzerain on behalf of the vassal. This is to inspire faithfulness on the part of both parties. Besides, whereas in covenant, everything seems to be more controlled and predictable, in hospitality what appear to be more prominent are the elements of surprise, expectancy, and fluidity which are more congenial to the revelatory nature of hospitality. God who comes in the stranger, the subaltern is one who arrives and presences in the most unexpected and unpredictable places. It is little wonder that Pharaoh fails to notice God speaking through Moses and Aaron, the representatives of the stranger (Israel) before him. God actually restored the silenced voice and demands that it be given a hearing. This is the work of hospitality; and authentic hospitality requires that the stranger, the subaltern, the outsider, not be silenced.

Indeed, the Greek noun for hospitality, *xenos* not only embodies a potential for fluidity but equally denotes simultaneously a guest, a host, or a stranger.” The verb, *xenizo* or *xenizein* means not only “to receive or entertain as a guest” but also “to surprise.” The fluidity characteristic of hospitality makes the exchange or reversal of roles between hosts and guests possible. Put another way, the stranger is the bearer of the culture, tradition, the world of meaning and values, and indeed the context s/he brings with him/her to an unfamiliar world where s/he depends on the hospitality of the host who is at home. In a certain sense then, the host as the homeowner becomes the guest of

⁴² See Israel J. Ekpo, *The History and Religion of Israel: From the Beginnings to the Period of the Return from Exile*, Time Series in Religious Studies (Lagos, Nigeria: Time Publications, 1997), 50-4.

the stranger who assumes the status of a host since the homeowner could always learn something from the stranger for their mutual transformation. Again, it is arguable that quite unlike some covenants, whenever and wherever genuine hospitality takes place, it always tends to a greater inclusiveness⁴³ by making boundary as border malleable, perforated, and unstable while recognizing and welcoming differences.

Clearly, covenants have a greater tendency to ossify or rigidify boundaries and to exclude those who do not identify with the initiated as covenant members. In capturing how the Hebrew people despised and excluded the Gentiles as uncircumcised pagans before Christ, for instance, Paul has this to say: “At that time you were without Christ, you did not belong to the community of Israel; the covenants of God and his promises were not for you” (Eph 2:12). In the same vein, the ritual of *Igba-ndu* which establishes a covenantal relationship can also be exclusive. Whereas those who have taken part in *Igba-ndu* now see themselves as sharing in one communion of life, as more or less “blood relatives,” those who have not taken part in the ritual may be viewed as “non-blood-relatives,” and hence, excluded. In other words, whereas covenants tend to exclude non-covenant members by hardening the distinction between outsiders and insiders, hospitality rather tends to expand and transform the frontier by welcoming the stranger who is not considered a “blood relative” but rather a foreigner who is a non-covenant member in the “conviction that God’s redeeming work always discloses itself...[in the subaltern] as well.”⁴⁴ In a covenant, the parties involved no longer see themselves as strangers to each other; they are like blood relatives with no more prejudices and fears

⁴³ See Ibid., 9.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

surrounding their relationship. Arguably, however, even before such rapprochement is achieved, it is fundamentally through hospitality that the tension between those who perceive themselves as insiders and as outsiders precipitated by the element of strangeness can be doused and defused. The interpellatory nature of hospitality functions to overcome the tension and transform the foreigner into a guest, and when welcomed, into a friend. On the basis of these clarifications, it is still my heartfelt contention that the model of hospitality remains a preferable metaphor for dealing with and for negotiating the boundaries of difference. It is a helpful model for a creative epistemology of an African theology that would be relevant in an era of World Christianity, of pluriversality, and globalization. At this juncture, before we move on to further tease out the notion of hospitality, I think it might be useful to review certain articulations of hospitality that in our estimation might rather be deemed deformations of hospitality.

4.3 Deformations of Hospitality/Friendship

In some ways, a number of philosophers (Western) have construed hospitality not only as a political practice but also as an exercise in virtue. Among such philosophers, we would focus on Aristotle, the disciple and student of Plato, since his sway continually underwrites much of the later traditions of Western ontological and epistemological constellations. To be treated here is Aristotle's take on magnanimity and charity as pathways to self-actualization as well as his understanding of friendship.

4.3.1 Aristotle's Notion of Self-Actualization and Hospitality/Friendship

In silhouetting the contours of interpersonal moral virtues necessary for political life, Aristotle derives their status basically from the vantage point of the self's (agent's)

own flourishing, *eudaimonia*, which, for him, is the *telos* of moral virtue and agency. There is no doubt that Aristotle is well aware that human beings are social by nature, for he states, "...no one would choose the whole world on condition of being alone, since man is a political creature and one whose nature is to live with others."⁴⁵ Consequently, humans as embedded within the complex web of relationships acquire virtues and live them out in relationality. But for Aristotle, the agent is not only the point of departure of all love, magnanimity, and hospitality but also the *terminus ad quem* of all such relationships since they are necessarily geared toward the perfecting of the self (agent) in virtue. It comes as no surprise that in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle introduces his thought thus: "relations with one's neighbors, and the marks by which friendships are defined, seem to have proceeded from a man's relations to himself."⁴⁶ For Aristotle, the good man is a lover of self who "wishes for himself what is good...and does so for his own sake."⁴⁷ This is the core characteristic of Aristotle's magnanimous man. It is only from this standpoint of agent-centeredness that any ethical relationship with the other is possible within the Aristotelian framework. In loving another, the self actually loves itself with the other merely playing an instrumental function. It is against this backdrop that Aristotle opines that "loving is better than being loved"⁴⁸ not because such act of loving is disinterested but because it is freighted with the investment of conducing to the

⁴⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1169^b19. All references to the *Nicomachean Ethics* (henceforth NE) are from the translations of W. D. Ross in *The Great Books of the Western World* ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago press, 1952).

⁴⁶ NE, 1166^a 1.

⁴⁷ NE, 1166^a 10-15; 1169^a 12.

⁴⁸ NE, 1159^a 27.

actualization of the potentialities of the self that would not otherwise be possible. To demonstrate this point, Aristotle employs the metaphor of the “producer – product” relationship to capture the operative dynamics between the hospitable, so-called magnanimous man and the beneficiary of his magnanimity or hospitality. Thus in loving the beneficiary, the hospitable benefactor stands to his beneficiary as to another self (that is, himself since the other simply becomes an extension of the self) because “the handiwork [who is here taken to be the beneficiary] is in a sense, the producer [who is the benefactor] in activity; he loves his handiwork ...for what he is in potentiality, his handiwork manifests in activity.”⁴⁹ Aristotle goes on to press home the point: “For a person regards what come from him as his own, as the owner regards his tooth or hair or anything....”⁵⁰ From the foregoing exposition, it becomes clear that in the ethical encounter or relationship between the self and the other, what is of cardinal importance for Aristotle is the self-actualization of the self, the good of the self while the other is merely the instrument for such a project.

This same matrix of self-actualization also shapes the contours of friendship in Aristotle. Friendship is possible only between two adults who are good in themselves (in the sense of lacking imperfection): “a good friend is by nature desirable for a good man.”⁵¹ Because the motivating factor in friendship is for whatever contributes to self-actualization, it is only a good friend who is perfect in virtue that can be desirable for the good man. This implies, therefore, that a friend in pain, for instance, cannot be desirable

⁴⁹ NE, 1168^a 1-5, 8-9; see 1167^b 16, 34-35.

⁵⁰ NE, 1161^b 19-24.

⁵¹ NE 1170^a 14.

for the good (magnanimous) man since he cannot understand how we could possibly “ask friends to share in our bad fortune, for that would bring them pain.”⁵² For Aristotle then, friendship between the good, shuns any kind of vulnerability or imperfection since that would not conduce to enhancing self-actualization but rather diminish or deter such prospect. Accordingly, a benevolent or magnanimous action for the sake of a friend is, after all said and done, a refined self-love in Aristotle.

This Aristotelian framework whose ghost has, no doubt, continually haunted Western epistemological systems is problematic and disturbing for a number of reasons some of which we would like to bring to limelight. First of all, for Aristotle, the essence of hospitality or beneficence is for the self to acquire virtue and become a hospitable/beneficent person. In this way, the self actualizes itself. On the contrary, when the self fails to be hospitable, that is, fails to attain virtue but rather relapses into vice by becoming, for instance, cruel, hostile, and tyrannical, then the only thing regrettable, going by the Aristotelian parameters, is the failure of the self to actualize itself and thus, stunting both its growth in virtue and its capacity to attain *eudaimonia*. Going by this frame of thought, cruelty is evil primarily because it is preclusive of the self’s flourishing. This position eliminates from view the fact that cruelty is first and foremost wrong because it is intrinsically evil and because of the violence it inflicts on the other who is made a victim and not necessarily because it does not contribute to the flourishing of the agent. As a matter of fact, way back in his *Politica* (treatise on Politics), Aristotle condemns tyranny only for its effects on the happiness (*eudaimonia*), virtue, and

⁵² Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth*, 51.

longevity of the tyrant.⁵³In other words, Aristotle's particular interest is not on the violence of the tyranny visited on the subjects of the tyrant but rather on the fact that tyranny precludes the *eudaimonia* and self-realization of the tyrant. Secondly, in this Aristotelian design, the beneficiary appears condemned to the receiving end as long as his existence makes it possible, in the first place, for the benefactor to realize his potential for beneficence. Since the benefactor needs a long time to cultivate this virtue, because virtues are acquired over a long span of time through practice, then the beneficiary necessarily needs to remain in his status as long as whatever time it takes the benefactor to become self-actualized. From this purview, it does not seem there is room for making the beneficiary to become independent. The recipient is condemned to a dependent status. And one insidious implication of this is that once the benefactor believes he has sufficiently acquired the virtue of beneficence (which is self-actualization/self-sufficiency), a tendency is for him to flaunt himself as being moral enough as though one can actually become moral enough leaving no more room for further striving and improvement. Thirdly, the Aristotelian magnanimous man confers gifts on the beneficiary without any expectation of material reciprocity from the latter. The gifts conferred only enable the giver to mature in virtue and thus serve to reinforce his sense of superiority and self-sufficiency as the benefactor. Gift giving and hospitality for the magnanimous man only serve to underline his superior status which accrues to him respect, honor, and prestige as a virtuous man. Lastly, this idea of gift giving and hospitality as a way of reinforcing the superiority of the giver necessarily creates a

⁵³ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1315^b 1-10.

polarity at whose opposite end is located the inferior recipient so-called precisely as unable to actualize him/herself since, according to Aristotle, it is better to love/give than to be loved/given. This approach leads to deformation when hospitality, as Letty Russell writes, “is practiced as a way of caring for so called ‘inferior people’ by those who are more advantaged and able to prove their superiority by being ‘generous,’ rather than...[being] a model of partnership.”⁵⁴

We must not simply use others as objects of our charity in order to make us feel satisfied as generous people. Worst still, when we dictate for the recipients of our so-called charity on how they may or may not use such charity. Russell suggests that:

We must strive to meet others as they are [that is, to see them the way they see themselves, not as we want to see them through the prism of our own eyes], not as objects of our charity, but as persons in their own right, capable of making choices about their destiny. If we insist they dress as we do and follow the same manners, we are not exercising hospitality but ‘reforming’ others to match our expectations.⁵⁵

Therefore, hospitality goes beyond mere charity. We cannot give others what they are undeserving (charity) unless and until we first of all give them what they are truly deserving (their just right to be respected for who they are, to equality, to human dignity, to life, to cultural and religious freedom, to actualize their own epistemic potential and destiny, and indeed to justice). We cannot give a person charity without at the same time

⁵⁴ Letty M. Russell, *Just Hospitality: God’s Welcome in a World of Difference*, eds., J. Shannon Clarkson and Kate M. Ott (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 80. This particular work is posthumously published after Russell passed away on July 12, 2007. Russell was a frequent writer on the theme of hospitality in systematic theology. Her other works include: *Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church* (Louisville, Minnesota: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), *Household of Freedom: Authority in Feminist Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987); *The Future of Partnership* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1979).

⁵⁵ Ibid., 80, 81.

removing imposed universal structures and institutions that continue to silence and inferiorize them and make them victims of massive evil. There can be no true charity without justice. Thus, beyond mere charity, hospitality requires deeds of genuine solidarity with those who are pushed into the border of subalternity rather than totalizing and letting them be trapped in the web of dependency and indebtedness.⁵⁶ But in this whole Aristotelian framework, it is glaringly obvious that the status of the recipient as a subject in his own right is left out of the picture. With too much of attention focused on the self (agent), that is, the benefactor and his self-actualization and prideful display of generosity, one wonders if this type of approach is not in any way contributive to the unjust structures that encourage dependency syndrome, control, manipulation, and as a ploy to support the structures of power discourse that remains operative through the process of globalization today.

Granted, Aristotle considers relationships anchored on utility or pleasure as inferior and egoistic. Yet the principal evil of such egoism expressed as greed, avarice, selfishness—which make victims—is not so much that it harms others as it harms the egoist, because by so doing, the egoist has dwarfed his own capacity for self-actualization. In the face of the scandalous poverty, flagrant destitution, and death from starvation, for instance, that have engulfed the Two-Thirds World largely due to neoliberal capitalism that feeds the greed, avarice, individualism, and inordinate consumerism of the One-Third World, Aristotle's approach in this case condemns not the injustice involved but only the failure of the consumerists to attain self-actualization in virtue. Additionally, this Aristotelian perspective comes to a head in his metaphysical

⁵⁶ See Ibid., 107.

theory of “act and potency” where he contends that existence, precisely as actuality, is the chief good. Transposing this idea to the notion of his ethical subject, Aristotle maintains that the chief good of the self is to actualize and maintain itself in being. And because existence or being is good, the self has to persevere in being by doing that which contributes to its flourishing. Therefore, besides delighting in the activity of being itself, the self also delights in the activity of being with itself.⁵⁷ The significance of this Aristotelian standpoint is found in the enormous influence it has wielded throughout the entire trajectory of Western philosophical and theological thoughts from Parmenides through Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, Sartre, Husserl, even Heidegger, and several others. It is about the notion of “persevering or persisting-in-being,” “being-for-itself” and “with-itself” which is finely captured by the Spinozean succinct terminology: *conatus essendi*. All in all, we maintain that, albeit, Aristotle articulated his idea of magnanimous and hospitable ethical relationship between the self and the other in the context of relationality, such relationship is deformed precisely because it centrally focuses on the self persevering in its own being, being-for-itself rather than being-for-the-other. Despite talk of beneficence to the other, it remains unclear whether at all the other has any “moral significance for the self except insofar as he or she is a function of that self’s own thrust toward self-actualization.”⁵⁸ Authentic hospitality is rather about allowing space for the stranger, the subaltern, the silenced and dependent to emerge and assume his or her own place as well actualize his or her own destiny. As Thomas

⁵⁷ NE, 1170^b 2-6; 1166^a 19-27; see also Cates Diana Fritz, *Choosing to Feel: Virtue, Friendship, and Compassion for Friends* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 53.

⁵⁸ Thomas W. Ogletree, *Dimensions of Moral Understanding: Hospitality to the Stranger* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 41.

Ogletree writes, “It involves a recognition in the other of a center of meaning and value which cannot legitimately be reduced in significance to our own drives for self-actualization.”⁵⁹ But before we can bring this argument full circle, it would be useful to attend to yet another philosophical issue which borders on the possibility and/or impossibility of hospitality.

4.4 The Thesis of the Impossibility of Hospitality

A fascinating phenomenon in so-called postmodernity is the increasingly renewed interest among postmodern philosophers in the question of human hospitality. This is particularly pertinent in the light of massive movements of people today through immigration and migration especially from the South to the North as well as the tensions stemming from the encounter with people, religions, cultures, and traditions which are different and so challenge one’s identity and primordial assumptions. In this section, I will be drawing on two postmodern philosophers, Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida with particular reference to their reflections on hospitality.

4.4.1 Emmanuel Levinas and Hospitality

Levinas, a Lithuanian Jew, “moved to France in 1923, studied under Husserl and Heidegger in Germany between 1928 and 1929 with robust enthusiasm for German phenomenology. In 1930 he published his first book on Husserl, *The Theory of Intuition in the Phenomenology of Husserl* which was actually his dissertation. However, beginning from the mid-thirties, his suspicion and dissatisfaction with the preponderance of ontology in Western thought reached a climax when later he shockingly learned that

⁵⁹ Ibid., 42.

his former teacher, Heidegger was involved with Nazism which for him was a political embarrassment. Coupled with his own (Levinas') five-year imprisonment and the murder of his parents and brothers by the Nazi regime, Levinas eventually came to reevaluate and interpret Heidegger's ontology as a splendid renewal of the Western tradition – the ontology of the Same. Levinas' philosophical enterprise can be said to be undergirded by one overarching concern: that Western thought is embedded in structures that do violence to the integrity of the "other." Consequent upon its violent tendencies and consistent suppression of the "other," Western philosophical thought suffers an inability to respect the "other."⁶⁰ On the way to exposing this proclivity, Levinas traces the penchant of Western tradition for an imperialistic "ontology of the Same" all the way back to Parmenides.⁶¹ His goal, as already noted in Chapter 1, is partly to liberate the "other" from the tyranny and totalizing objectification by the same or the self. He makes it a point of duty to question and to break with the consistent preoccupation of Western thought with "perseverance-in-being" as we saw figured above in Aristotle and others. This preoccupation with *essendi* upon which, by the way, Western culture is founded according to Levinas, expresses itself by imposing rational categories (claimed to be universal) on reality, on the world including the human other. In this way, reality, and particularly the human person is conceived merely as an epistemic other—an object of intentionality—whose epistemic status is real only in the consciousness of the self. The other is scrutinized, measured, evaluated, judged, and known from the standpoint of the

⁶⁰ Colin Davis, *Levinas: An Introduction* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 1.

⁶¹ Adriaan Peperzak, *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1993), 13.

self. The other is not regarded in his/her own terms. Indeed, the other is constructed and ontologized either as an object or area of study by what Mignolo calls the “coloniality of power.” This particular trend which runs across the entire gamut of Western thought constitutes an ontological violence as it undermines the alterity of the other who is another center of consciousness, value, and meaning. This ontological violence which involves an attempt to construct the other in the image and likeness of the self has the implication of refusal to accept the other as other. Thus Western cultures including their politics and economics which are undergirded by a totalizing, assimilating, and imperializing metaphysics as well as purported universal epistemological categories naturally lead to violence, domination, oppression, and suppression because they scarcely leave room for difference, for the irruption of the other. At any rate, the other for Levinas remains irreducible to the “same.” In his alterity, the other, unlike other phenomena, remains an enigma that defies a definition in phenomenological terms, because the other is never given or comprehended in consciousness.⁶²

Levinas’ starting point on the way to upend and break with this Western metaphysical tradition is not the self’s unyielding quest for self-actualization, centeredness, or self-integration through persisting in being. Rather he starts with the notion of the “face” of the other. To be sure, the face, one of the key terms in Levinas, is, according to Colin Davis, “problematic because it both does and does not refer to real human faces. The face is that part of the body of other people which is most readily (or most often) visible; it is also the most expressive part of the body, and the notion of the

⁶² Ibid., 21.

face as *expression* (emphasis mine) plays an important part in Levinas' think-ing."⁶³ The face in Levinas is primarily not a thing seen or intended. Hence writes Levinas, "The face is present in its refusal to be contained. In this sense it cannot be comprehended, that is, encompassed. It is neither seen nor touched – for in visual or tactile sensation the identity of the I envelops the alterity of the object, which becomes precisely a content."⁶⁴ It is as expression, speech, discourse that the face reveals itself. The face does not reveal itself to be seen, but rather to be heard. The face of the Other speaks to me.

The speech of the face is simultaneously an imperative and an appeal. As an imperative, it questions and repudiates the self for its egoistic and murderous tendencies to suppress and assimilate the other. At the same time it is an appeal to the self to accept, respect, recognize, and welcome the discourse of the face even in its destitution in manifestation. The speech of the face is thus an invitation to welcome and openness to plurality and difference. Levinas uses such adjectives as higher and lower to describe the mode of the approach of the other who addresses the self in the other's face.⁶⁵ The other comes as higher not in the sense of dominating the self since his resistance, precisely as ethical, is preeminently nonviolent and nonethnocidal.⁶⁶ Rather higher is understood in the sense that the imperative nature of his speech and call challenges, interpellates, judges the arbitrariness of the self's proclivity to homogenization and absorption of whatever lies outside it into the hegemony of its empire. The face of the Other in its speech thus

⁶³ Davis, *Levinas*, 46.

⁶⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 194.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 203.

traumatizes, shocks, and shakes the self's powers of totalizing, dominating, and appropriating the other, questioning the self's propensity to persist in being and satisfying only itself. The face thus shocks the thematizing self with the truth about itself and thus marks the self's limits. At the same time, the other is lower because he approaches the self not with coercive power but in destitution and defenselessness, with an appeal to be welcomed while calling the self to ethical responsibility.

Levinas presses home the idea of the irreducibility of the other whose alterity is non-adequate to any perception in intentionality by contending that the other speaking in the face approaches the self in a "dimension of height."⁶⁷ The other speaking to me in the face is my master and my teacher. More to the point, Levinas means to say by this that:

the...encounter with the other opens up a new world of meaning to which I otherwise have no access. I do not possess that world within my own orientation to meaning, not even latently. Thus, I cannot presume that the other is like me or that I can understand the other on the analogy of my own experience—perhaps through a process of identification and projection. If I am to approach the other's world of meaning, I must let him teach me about it, open its contours and nuances to me.⁶⁸

This is a very important caveat from Levinas. We cannot gain access to the system of meaning and value constituted by the world of inhabitation of the other by imposing our own particular categories, projecting our own perceptions and understandings upon him under the assumption or pretext that they have universal validity for all. That kind of universal rationality silences the voice of the other who should be heard as an epistemic center of its own. To comprehend the other solely according to our own system of

⁶⁷Ibid., 34.

⁶⁸Ogletree, *Dimensions of Moral Understanding*, 48.

meaning and value amounts to an ontological and epistemological violence. We cannot master or know the other in advance since his alterity resists such mastery and determination. It is only in the context of discourse, the speech of the face that the infinity or mystery of the being of the other and his world is revealed to the self. Ethical responsibility in Levinasian perspective, therefore, entails the readiness and openness to allow the other to come to audibility and not to silence him. This responsibility to welcome and not to thematize the other who approaches, to hear the speech in the other's face, to learn from the other, is what hospitality is about in Levinas.

According to Levinas, this ethical responsibility is infinite. On this side of the eschaton, we can never become moral enough; enough can never be enough. We are never done with the neighbor who always concerns us,⁶⁹ with being responsible toward others, especially toward the weak, the widow, the poor, and the stranger. Again, according to Levinas, this responsibility toward the other is not only infinite, but also non-symmetrical. Unlike Buber who sees the *I-Thou* relationship as one of symmetrical reciprocity, for Levinas, it is decisively asymmetrical because it does not wait for reciprocity which tends to subject hospitality to calculations of deficits and compensations in cost accounting.⁷⁰ My responsibility and obligation toward the other is not conditioned on what I stand to get out of it or on the other's reciprocal obligatory indebtedness to me. In this way, Levinas rejects the traditional vocation of being as

⁶⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 1981), 114; *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 108; see Jill Robins, ed., *Is it Righteous to be?: Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001), 2.

⁷⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *Humanism of the Other*, trans. Nidra Poller (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 27.

being-for-itself, the interestedness and perseverance of being-in-itself and for-itself, which he considers, to be at the root of all the crises of civilizations, the wars, and the massive atrocities of the twentieth century. Although the word, hospitality, features rarely in Levinas' works, Jacques Derrida, however, affirms that "*Totality and Infinity* bequeaths to us an immense treatise *of hospitality* (emphasis original)."⁷¹

All in all, Levinas has posited that the practice of hospitality is necessary particularly in the light of pluralism and difference. His perspective proffers a fascinating corrective to the structures of the universal epistemology of the colonality of power that continues to hold sway in our globalized world. Hospitality and friendship should serve as central elements of our relational activity as members of the comity of one common humanity. Such perspective recognizes our equality-in-difference in a way that is enriching rather than destructive of each other. Albeit, his account of the encounter between the I and the other is not an event that is located within synchronic and historical real time because the other rather approaches from a diachronic, pre-originary, and immemorial past, it, nevertheless, has real time analogue and relevance. The Levinasian "face" which speaks must be seen and heard in the faces of all those who are oppressed, subjugated, and silenced by the colonality of power of the modern/colonial world system's imaginary. Indeed, along these lines, his account provides "a structural possibility that precedes and makes possible all subsequent [real time historical] experience."⁷² Let us now turn to Derrida.

⁷¹ Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999), 21.

⁷² Davis, *Levinas*, 45.

4.4.2 Jacques Derrida and the Impossibility of Hospitality

The ethical concern expressed by Levinas particularly with respect to the obligation to respond with hospitality toward the epiphany of the other who approaches the self has been appropriated and expanded by Derrida (1930-2004), the philosopher of deconstruction. During the last few years of his life, Derrida wrote two books on the theme of hospitality. The first is entitled *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* in which he not only analyzes the idea of hospitality in the oeuvre of Levinas but also builds on it. The second is entitled simply *Of Hospitality*. Besides Levinas, Derrida's reflection on the theme of hospitality equally developed in conversation with the philosophical strands in Søren Kierkegaard, Husserl, and especially Kant.⁷³

Immanuel Kant, the philosopher from Königsberg reflected on the theme of hospitality in the context of his discussion on the conditions for peace between states. In his essay on *Perpetual Peace* (1795) Kant describes what seems to be a universal hospitality as the right of a stranger not to be treated as an enemy when he arrives in the land of another. The stranger may arrive in another's country with a claim to a universal right to hospitality, to be welcomed, on the grounds that "all men are entitled to present themselves in the society of others by virtue of their right to communal possession of the earth's surface."⁷⁴ This stems from Kant's universal conception inspired by his Judeo-

⁷³ For detail, see James K. A. Smith, *Jacques Derrida: Live Theory* (New York and London: Continuum, 2005), esp. chap. 3; Mark Dooley, "The Politics of Exodus: Derrida, Kierkegaard, and Levinas on 'Hospitality,'" in *Works of Love*, ed. Robert L. Perkins, International Kierkegaard Commentary 16 (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1999), 167-92. Cf. Amos Yong, *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2008), 118.

⁷⁴ See Immanuel Kant, "Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch," in *Kant: Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss, trans. H. B. Nisbet, 2nd enlarged ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 105-6.

Christian heritage that “originally, no one had more right than another to a particular part of the earth.”⁷⁵ However, this universal hospitality is one that is conditioned. The stranger must behave peaceably in another’s country. And he only has the right of resort and not the right of guest. With the right of resort, the stranger has only a right of temporary visit and not the right of permanent stay which would be the right of guest.⁷⁶

Derrida rejects this conditioned hospitality as articulated by Kant because, for him, it is plagued by determinacy and involves a horizon of expectation. Because it is in the nature of this conditional hospitality of reciprocity to spawn a vicious circle of indebtedness which is characteristic of the logic of the economy of exchange, Derrida is led to enunciate the impossibility of hospitality. Insofar as we remain entangled in the web of the economy of exchange, pure and true hospitality not already tainted by the reciprocal logic of debts and obligations remains an impossibility. Derrida thus distinguishes between this conditional hospitality continually threatened by the logic of indebtedness and absolute hospitality that is freely given. Such unconditional and absolute hospitality requires that before welcoming the stranger who approaches, we forego all profiling, all judging, all analyzing, and evaluating of the other. The whole point of identification is to engender knowledge, vision, and prejudice which eventually lead to thematization and control. Pure hospitality then requires that we desist from continuing the violence that tries to construct the other by shaping him into our own image. Derrida rather suggests that pure hospitality requires a radical and absolute

⁷⁵ Cited in Naas, *Taking on the Tradition*, 162-3.

⁷⁶ See Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, ed. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1957), 20-21.

openness to the advent of the wholly other without any prefiguration.⁷⁷ This wholly other refers not only to God but also to every human person. The other as the wholly other transcends all determinacy, possibility, presence, and possibility. For Derrida, violence is intricately interwoven within the structures of conditional hospitality as understood along Kantian lines of totalization. In the light of this violence, Derrida rejects it in favor of unconditional and absolute hospitality.

In making the case for radical and absolute openness to the advent of the newcomer, Derrida rejects all manner of messianism. Put another way, he is wary of any claim to any definitive arrival of the kingdom in any particular messianic figure. For such a claim would be preclusive of the radical openness to the future of the ceaseless advent of the other, a future removed from the violence and regime of presence, the presentable, and the programmable. Hence Derrida argues for a messianicity without messianism, a revelation without vision, a religion without religion, without truth, without knowledge since the wholly other cannot be identified with any determinable faith or a determinable messiah.⁷⁸ Derrida wants to overcome the determinacy of religion and messianism which generate determinable faiths that brew pernicious absolutism, universalism, and triumphalism engendering exclusion and exclusiveness. For Derrida, the freedom of the wholly other prohibits its containment within the determinate dogmatic content of any particular historical religion, institution, or program. To do so amounts to reducing the

⁷⁷ See Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone," in *Religion*, ed. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo, trans. Samuel Weber (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998), 17.

⁷⁸ John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, eds., *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), esp. chap. 2: "On the Gift: A Discussion between Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion," 54-78 at 73.

wholly other to the regime of sameness. For that reason, Derrida emphatically insists on “the infinite respect of the singularity and infinite alterity of the other.”⁷⁹ The notion of messianicity has the character of an absolute openness to an indeterminate future that can never be fully realized. It is a messianicity whose future hope and promise ceaselessly remain to come (*à venir*) and absolutely undetermined. Accordingly then, pure hospitality implies messianicity. Derrida’s search for an indeterminate messianicity is undoubtedly informed by his fear of the violence often associated with particular messianisms, whether it is of Judaism (Zionism), Christianity, or of Islam. For the moment that messianic future is claimed to be realized, then hospitality becomes thrust into the horizon of determinacy, and hence, leads to the impossibility of the avoidance of violence.

However, despite this quest for unconditional hospitality with indeterminate messianicity, Derrida realizes that within the limits of time and space, hospitality is always caught up within the aporia of indeterminacy and determinacy, unconditionality and conditionality. This aporia is the dilemma—which Derrida describes as the double bind—of hospitality. While, on the one hand, pure hospitality entails unconditional welcome extended to the stranger, on the other, Derrida realizes that the stranger must be welcomed in a particular way, by means of particular protocols and conventions, and within a particular symbolic universe and language.⁸⁰ In other words, the conditionality of hospitality entails that it have a specific context. Therefore, for the welcome to be real and effective, the stranger must somehow be identified, called out or be greeted by name.

⁷⁹ Jacques Derrida, *The Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 31.

⁸⁰ See Naas, *Taking on the Tradition*, 159.

Yet, Derrida is not unmindful of the slippery slope which stealthily lurks at the background. For in the context of the particularities and conditionalities of hospitality, there is often the tendency that the process of “identification always risks negating the hospitality that is extended; for in inviting, recognizing, or identifying the stranger, in subjecting him or her to our suppositions or our knowledge if not our prejudices, the stranger always risks becoming a relative nonstranger ...who look[s], sound[s], and smell[s] like us...who share[s] our tastes.”⁸¹ The real danger is how within the fabric of conditionality, the posing of a question which quite frankly should be a welcoming gesture to the stranger who approaches could easily be transcoded into a tool for thematization, control, and the shaping of the stranger into our own image, to become one who is like us in order to be welcomed.

As a way to get around this aporetic double bind, Derrida first of all comes to the concession that both ends of the hospitality spectrum—the unconditional or unlimited and the conditional—are necessary. Real hospitality consists in unconditionally welcoming the unexpected guest into a particular symbolically and linguistically conditioned context. Derrida’s concession is not based on the fact that we are incapable of pure and unconditional hospitality perhaps due “to our finitude...our limited capacities and resources, or...simply...[due] to political expediency.”⁸² It is rather the recognition that real hospitality is always about welcoming particular guests and not indiscriminate or indeterminate “wholly other.” Because the welcoming question is threatened always by the danger of turning into an inquisition and thematization, Derrida suggests that

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 164.

deconstruction is necessary. Deconstruction thus becomes a thoroughgoing critique of the consistent propensity to insist on the solidity and purity of being and of trying to shape the other into our image. At any rate, because for Derrida, real hospitality has to consist in the welcoming of a particular guest in a particular context, then pure hospitality is always impure, it is always compromised insofar as it is enacted, realized, and made effective in real time. Therefore, for Derrida, unconditional hospitality is and should remain an impossibility.

Moreover, Derrida addresses himself to the question of “gift.” Utilizing the same trend of thought, he maintains that a pure gift is unpresentable and absolutely undetermined. He opines that there is never pure altruism in gift-giving.⁸³ Gift giving is always betrayed or even cancelled by at least the hidden desire for affirmation. Even if this affirmation does not come from the recipient of the gift, the giver of the gift somehow repeats it to himself by way of confirming the gift he has given. This is what Derrida calls iterability. It is this idea of repetition inherent in the word, gift, or promise that betrays it by changing the context and meaning of the original to the horizon of economy, knowledge, determination, and so on, because the repetition brings it into presence. Derrida thus insists on the impossibility of the gift. For the gift cannot be brought into presence while still remaining a gift either on the side of the donor or the recipient; it is impossible for pure gift to be present. The gift as such is entirely foreign to the horizon of theoretical determination and analytic knowledge, economy, ontology, and conceptual definition. The gift as such, like hospitality, cannot be legitimately presented

⁸³ Jacques Derrida, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, ed., John D. Caputo (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 140-51.

in reality, for the moment it is achieved, it ceases to be a gift. Ultimate messianic justice and the dreams of realizing absolute hospitality as conceived by Derrida remain an eschatological reality that awaits us, that is to come (*à venir*).

4.4.2.1 A Critical Evaluation of Derrida's Deconstructionism

Derrida's brilliant insights are well taken. There is no doubt that he and other postmodern deconstructionists are trying to subvert the specter of Western epistemological traditions with their entrenched totalities which thematize and oppress. This has always been a central problem more especially since the time of the history of the modern/colonial world system which classified alterity on the basis of the normativity of Western global designs that created the regions of subalternity. However, it must be said that Derrida's conceptualities are still troubling. Although, Derrida has a project of dismantling totalities, he appears to end up merely in deconstruction for the sake of it. The radicality of his deconstruction which negates everything determinate as the horizon of totality and economic exchange leads him to take flight into the realm of absolutes that defy mediation in history. Because such absolutes are never mediated, Derrida ends up critiquing the imperfections of determinate historical practices rather than providing solutions on how to improve on them. He criticizes religions and other determinate entities merely for what they cannot achieve in terms of pure and perfect realization of, say, hospitality or the gift, within history, than in encouraging them to bear a better and more effective witness in showing hospitality in the best possible way they can.⁸⁴ By emphasizing the absolutes, he is unknowingly reconstituting the old dualisms (much like

⁸⁴ Anselm K. Min, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World: A Postmodern Theology after Postmodernism* (New York and London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 39.

“same” versus “other” that he is trying to overcome) that have always plagued Western thought. For to speak of unconditional, indeterminate, pure, is to at the same time imply their opposites, conditional, determinate, and impure. Because his absolute conceptualities allow no place for mediation for fear of the regime of sameness, he has difficulty finding a middle ground as a way to get around the opposite ends of his conceptual spectrum. But the truth remains that reality is never unmediated.

Moreover, Derrida tends to be blind to the reality that one can never simply think, inquire, and know in a vacuum or from a delocalized “zero point”⁸⁵ that constitutes an indubitably neutral objective foundation outside a tradition. Although his goal, as for other postmodernists, is to subvert that tradition, nevertheless, the presuppositions of that same tradition are still implicit in his thought. Basically, Derrida simply re-inscribes Enlightenment rationalism (pure reason that is merely logocentric and ahistorical abstraction). Indeed, it is legitimate to say that Derrida thinks in supraessentialist terms and “otherization.” Hence, Derrida’s religion without religion, his messianicity without messianism can only continue to remain pure and absolute as long as they lack incarnation and mediation in history. From the Christian tradition, the absolute, transcendent, and incomprehensible God is the same God incarnated in Jesus from Nazareth (that subaltern region). And because Derrida gets lost in ahistorical abstraction and logocentrism, his perspective fails to be fully attentive to the reality of the situated and particular historical living experiences of the subalterns. The reality of such subaltern historical experiences and knowledges is completely foreign to Derrida even though he may have a notional idea of it; but it is not the same as being a subaltern. Hence, it is only

⁸⁵ Gerald M. Boodoo, *Caribbean Theology: Where Now?*(A Conference Paper).

the subalterns who can give expression to their own historical experiences which equally enjoys an epistemic status. As a matter of fact, Derrida is thinking from a position of power (coloniality of power) and has no knowledge of the reality of colonial difference from the subaltern perspective. He can only learn it from the subalterns themselves. If hospitality cannot be incarnated or mediated, how can the margins emerge from that constructed subalternity of inaudibility where nothing good comes from according to the coloniality of power, but where, nonetheless, divine revelation irrupts? Precisely as caught up in ahistorical abstraction, Derrida's deconstruction is, at the long run, still totalizing. No doubt, Derrida indulges in negative theology in order to save transcendence from being encapsulated in a determinable way. But by claiming that the best that can be said about transcendence is the radicality of the unconditioned, then Derrida presupposes or implies that he already knows in advance all about transcendence. This, in itself, is thematization. Thus, Derrida plunges back head on into what he is trying to escape from. The issue is that Derrida's thinking is still rooted in Western metaphysical tradition which only thinks in terms of "First Cause" or "Absolute Foundation." In line with this understanding, that which "never arrives," "always without limit," that which "continues to become," is for metaphysics beyond thought and defies its logic, since the only logic possible for it is that of absolute foundation, the logic of sameness, or finished-product (object). But God's gift is a non-object, it is grace.

Besides, Derrida's emphasis on the infinite and absolute singularity of the individual out of fear of reducing or "fusing" the individual into the horizon of the "We" or perhaps to avoid subscribing to schizophrenic personality, rather isolates the individual absolutely with an absolute responsibility. Any claim to absolute obligation or absolute

responsibility, realistically speaking, amounts to an assumption that is false. We always exist as integrated relational beings and we need relationality and the solidarity of others to achieve what, as individuals, we cannot achieve alone all by ourselves. Add to that, Derrida's emphasis on absolute singularity loses sight of the reality of multiple identities, that an individual can inhabit multiple identities at the same time largely because of dichotomous experiences which are never had in isolation. Such dichotomous experiences find expression, for instance, in Homi Bhabha's "in-between" or "border dwelling," W. E. B. Du Bois' "double consciousness," Abdelkebir Khatibi's "double critique," Luke Mbefo's "two-fold heritage," and so on. That is why we need an other perspective, an other paradigm or logic of thinking which is relational because it is not ethnocidal but rather accommodating of a diversity and pluriversality of local narratives simultaneously since even the tradition or memory which Derrida's thinking presupposes is also itself a local history or local epistemic center. In any case, Derrida's take on absolute hospitality and pure gift as impossibilities helps us to appreciate all the more a pneumatological foundation of hospitality and the gift. The very impossibility that Derrida highlights is precisely what is made present in the superabundance or rather the excess of God's gift of divine hospitality made available through Jesus Christ in the Spirit. But before we treat this, let us in the following section explore Mignolo's notion of "border thinking" as an other paradigm that is accommodating of differences not in an oppressive way but à la equality-in-difference.

4.5 Walter Mignolo and Border Thinking

In order to put a finger on his notion of "border thinking," Argentinian semiotician and decolonial thinker, Walter Mignolo, tries in his book, *Local*

Histories/Global Designs, to, first of all, theorize what he describes as the “colonial difference” in the formation and transformation of the “modern/colonial world system.”⁸⁶ Drawing on and expanding the insights of Immanuel Wallerstein and others, Mignolo underscores that colonial experiences in their variety of shapes and forms started all the way back from the 1500s with the emergence of the Americas to the second half of the twentieth century in the emergence of global colonialism. By coupling “modern/colonial,” Mignolo and other decolonial thinkers want to insist that coloniality and the “coloniality of power” do not simply end with early forms of active colonization of peoples and lands forcefully appropriated and occupied. Rather, the colonial project still perdures and is inextricably linked with “the modern world since it is part and parcel of modernity...not a later addition to the modern project. The modern project and the colonial project go hand in hand. As long as we exist in the modern world (as we are especially in a modern world system such as neo-liberal capitalism) we are existing in contexts that exhibit structures of coloniality and the coloniality of power.”⁸⁷ Again, the coupling of modernity/coloniality allows Mignolo to highlight “the spatial dimension imbedded in the modern world system that is lacking in the linear conception [(such as early modern, modern, and late modern)] of modern Western history.”⁸⁸ With the emergence of global colonialism and the enduring coloniality of power, the spatial dimension of the system shows that the colonial difference is no longer restricted to the external borders or peripheries (where it is still present) away from the metropolitan

⁸⁶ Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, ix.

⁸⁷ Boodoo, *Caribbean Theology*.

⁸⁸ Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, ix.

centers but is today, perhaps thanks to migration and communication, all over, in the peripheries and in the centers as well. Let me now throw more light on some of the key terminologies used here.

Coloniality: Decolonial thinkers make a distinction between colonialism and coloniality. As already noted above, whereas colonialism entails the formal subjugation of peoples, the occupation of their lands, and exploitation of their resources, coloniality has to do with a complex, pervasive, and expansive reach of hegemonic power throughout the planet. Indeed, coloniality is the matrix out of which colonialism emerges, such that even in the wake of colonialism, coloniality—which maintains structures of power discourse that classify and subjugate people on the basis of race, class, gender, production of knowledge, and so on—far from being history, is still alive and well today especially “in its new guise of global coloniality.”⁸⁹

Coloniality of Power: A term which Mignolo adopted from Anibal Quijano identifies it with capitalism and its consolidation in Europe from the 15th to the 18th centuries. Accordingly, it refers to the way by which the entire planet with its continents was classificatorily articulated and legitimated on the basis of an epistemological perspective that utilizes certain institutional structures as channels of production of knowledge. Those channels which function to articulate, control, and manage such classifications (in which task the concept of culture becomes crucial) include (state, university, church, and so on).⁹⁰ Mignolo contends that “Eurocentrism becomes, therefore, a metaphor to describe the coloniality of power from the perspective of

⁸⁹ Ibid., xiv.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 17

subalternity. From the epistemological perspective, European local knowledge and histories have been projected to global designs....”⁹¹ Global designs are, therefore, always local histories created in the metropolitan centers and then exported, implemented, and enacted as universal for all in various particular places. Coloniality of power is thus a “conflict of knowledges and structures of power.”⁹²

Within the modern project, coloniality of power, through its classificatory agenda, creates the “inside” and the “outside” of modernity. The regions, cultures, and those on the outside are considered of interest only as areas and objects of study and knowable only through the prism of Western epistemology. In this way, the outside of modernity became a place of inferiorization and subalternization, a place of subjugated and silenced epistemic potential. Worst still, those on the outside of modernity were repeatedly and forcefully taught to reject and despise all knowledges, histories, and traditional forms of thought native to the subalterns. By so doing, such subjugated knowledges (viewed as inadequate, naïve, unscientific, and thus, disqualified) became buried under the guise of functionalist systematized knowledge and all “in the name of disciplinarity and scientificity in the production of knowledge.”⁹³ The coloniality of power thus subjected the subalterns to Eurocentric epistemological hegemony as the only nomothetic and scientific way of knowing and thereby creating a spiral of dependency and imitative tradition. Hence, diversity and plurality were sacrificed on the murky stable of Eurocentrism. This is what has been described by decolonial thinkers as the dark side of

⁹¹ Ibid.,

⁹² Ibid., 16.

⁹³ See Ibid., 20.

modernity.⁹⁴ Those who wield the colonality of power from inside modernity and who, therefore, benefit from it, are easily blinded to the devastating negative impact of modernity on the vast majority who are outside. An Etche aphorism says: “*shi onye nyuru anaghi eshi ya ishi*” which literally means “one’s own excrement does not smell foul to the person; it is rather more off-putting and repugnant to others.” This is a way of saying how easily a person can be blind, unperceiving, and insensitive to the negative and repulsive effects of his or her action on others. It is this space of negative impact created by the colonality of power outside modernity that is described as the “colonial difference” in decolonial thought (that is, the difference between the inside and outside of modernity). It is the space where local histories (emanating from inside modernity) inventing and implementing global designs intersect or conflict with subaltern local histories (outside modernity). Fascinatingly, Mignolo not only sees the “colonial difference” as the space where the colonality of power through global designs is enacted but also where the restitution of subaltern knowledges and histories is taking place.⁹⁵ This point of intersection between subaltern local histories and global designs is where “border thinking” takes place.

Border Thinking: Border thinking is still within the imaginary of the modern/colonial world system but truly takes place in the space of colonial difference and subalternity (the space of repressed and silenced local knowledges and histories by the colonality of power through global designs). Mignolo contends that border thinking, properly speaking, can only work and “be such from a subaltern perspective and never

⁹⁴ Ibid., 22.

⁹⁵ Ibid., ix.

from a territorial (e.g. inside modernity) one. Border thinking from a territorial perspective becomes a machine of appropriation of the colonial difference; the colonial difference as an object of study rather than as an epistemological potential. Border thinking from the perspective of subalternity is a machine for intellectual decolonization.”⁹⁶ Border thinking as a form of decolonial construction which emerges as a response to the wound of the colonial difference is less a discourse of resistance than a discourse of unsubjecting and legitimizing local histories and epistemic loci that were subalternized and repressed during the long process of the colonization of the planet.⁹⁷

It is, therefore, not so much a new idea as a new way of thinking, an other paradigm or logic of thinking not anchored on universal reason and global designs. Border thinking which emerges in the moments of cracks in the imaginary of the modern/colonial world system implies “a new opportunity of breaking open closed gates”⁹⁸ for subalternized and silenced perspectives to become foregrounded. In restituting subalternized and silenced local histories to the foreground, border thinking, by the same token, reveals the particularity and “the local histories from which global designs emerge in their universal drive.”⁹⁹ In this sense, border thinking aims at intellectual “decolonization, and transformations of the rigidity of epistemic and territorial *frontiers* established and controlled by the colonality of power...(emphasis

⁹⁶ Ibid., 45.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 13.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 40.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 21.

original).”¹⁰⁰ This also means that subaltern knowledges and histories can no longer be viewed only as objects of study; subalterns must be viewed as subjects and no longer as objects of study according to the canon of Western social sciences. Subalternity produces not simply cultures and objects to be studied but also intellectuals who are producing a body of knowledge and generating theories as they reflect on their own cultures and local histories. This body of knowledge is also scientific in its own rights and must not be silenced any longer by the coloniality of power but recognized and respected especially in academia. This calls to mind Valentin Mudimbe’s observation: “Since the 1960s African theorists...ideologues [philosophers, theologians, and so on], rather than confiding in and depending on...[Western *episteme*], have tended to use critical analysis as a means for establishing themselves as ‘subjects’ of their own destiny, taking responsibility for the ‘invention’ of their past as well as of the conditions for modernizing their societies.”¹⁰¹ As a matter of fact, Mudimbe underscores that since the end of World War II, it has meant the possibility of new open gates for “new theories in the African field”¹⁰² in the light of contextual determination. To Mignolo’s point then, border thinking as “an other paradigm”—and as an alternative to global designs, abstract universal, and neutrally objective knowledge—is not a return to another essentialist “otherization” (à la Boodoo), but a recognition that every knowledge, every history is situated. As an other paradigm, the logic of border thinking is, therefore, “a logic of the

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 12.

¹⁰¹ V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), 167.

¹⁰² Ibid., 165.

plural”¹⁰³ and requires that no tradition projects itself as an abstract neutral universal to be imposed on all.

Border thinking as “an other thinking” is not murderous because it does not thematize or totalize. Its aim is not conquest but intellectual decolonization, the unsubjugation, and foregrounding of forced, dislocated, and silenced subaltern local histories/knowledges. It is, according to Mignolo, “a way of thinking that is not inspired in its own limitations and is not intended to dominate and to humiliate; a way of thinking that is universally marginal, fragmentary, and unachieved; and as such, a way of thinking that, because universally marginal and fragmentary, is not ethnocidal.”¹⁰⁴ And because border thinking can only be such from a subaltern perspective and never from the inside of modernity, it is border thinking that can actually not only interpellate modernity’s global designs but also dismantle them through intellectual decolonization.

Decolonization is a form of deconstruction but from a subaltern perspective on the exteriority of modernity. Decolonial thinking, thus problematizes intra-modern discourses and Eurocentric critiques of modernity (e.g., postmodernism and Eurocentric deconstruction). That is why Derrida, as we have seen above, can only do Eurocentric deconstruction but not decolonizing deconstruction because he criticizes modernity’s totalizing and thematizing propensity from the inside, from the perspective of modernity itself. He cannot do decolonization because of his blindness to the colonial difference. Perhaps that is why, at the long run, Derrida relapses into the same absolutizing and totalizing categories that he is trying to displace in the first place. This is because he is

¹⁰³ Ibid., 247.

¹⁰⁴ Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 68.

seeking alternatives inside the same modernity that grounds his thinking and utilizing categories that have the same origin in the logocentric hubris of Western episteme. Clearly, Derrida seems to not be able to think outside “absolutes.” He is not able to think the colonial difference but limits himself only to the colonial structure of every culture which he absolutizes: “All culture is *originally* colonial (emphasis mine).”¹⁰⁵ Derrida’s phobia for determinacy and particularity makes him think that any talk about the particularity of a socio-historical culture, religion, or knowledge automatically leads to a kind of sovereignty, a kind of law coming from elsewhere, and so to domination. Hence, all culture is colonial. Consequently, the only way he thinks for him to get around this aporia of domination of any determinate entity, is to dwell in the “absolutes” leading to “religion without religion,” “politics without politics,” “culture without culture,” with no mediation or incarnation in determinate particularities. Thus, Derrida is still caught up in the abstract and remains in custody of the universal proclivity of modernity’s concept of “pure reason.”

But border thinking which emerges out of the colonial difference understands what it means “to be or feel in between,” to have “a double consciousness,” and to have multiple identities. Border dwelling or the “in-between” where border thinking takes place is a space for negotiating differences, and especially a locus for letting the silenced voice of the stranger, the subaltern, be enunciated. Border thinking, in this way, aims at the “multiplication of epistemic energies in diverse local histories”¹⁰⁶ and at remapping

¹⁰⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Le monolinguisme de l’autre* (Paris: Galilee, 1996), 68, cited in Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 83.

¹⁰⁶ Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 39.

colonial differences toward a future world characterized by an ethics and a politics of *pluriversality* (a combination of plural and universality).

Pluriversality stands to dethrone the monolingual, totalizing neutral reason or global designs invented, exported, implemented, and enacted in the name of universality. To be sure, “pluriversality is an attempt to make visible and viable a multiplicity of knowledges, forms of being, and visions of the world. Pluriversality is equality-in-difference, the possibility that many worlds can fit in one world. It is the future alternative to modernity/coloniality.”¹⁰⁷ This notion of pluriversality resonates with the Igbo African aphorism: “*egbe bere ugo bere; nke si ibe ya ebele, nku kwa ya*” which means “let the eagle perch and let the kite perch; may the one that denies the other the right to perch have its wings dislocated.” It is a call to us that in spite of our differences, we can all coexist in one world without the one oppressing the other. Pluriversality is, therefore, open to what Mignolo calls macronarratives.

The notion of macronarratives is not a reinscription of metanarratives. Rather, it is aimed at dethroning the hegemony of abstract universalism of modernity’s global designs. Mignolo conceives macronarratives “as a network of [multiple diversity of] local histories and multiple local...[epistemologies]”¹⁰⁸ engendering the possibility of “dialogical thinking”¹⁰⁹—which is a thinking *with* (as subjects) rather than a thinking *for* or a thinking *about* other people and their history (as objects of study)—and “double

¹⁰⁷ Gregory Banazak and Luis Reyes Ceja, “The Challenge and Promise of Decolonial Thought to Biblical Interpretation,” in *Postscript* 4, 1 (2008):113-127 at 118, cited in Boodoo, *Caribbean Theology*.

¹⁰⁸ Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 22.

¹⁰⁹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, [1972] 1993).

translation' allowing for an intersection between incommensurable (from the perspective of modernity) forms of knowledge.”¹¹⁰ Within the matrix of pluriversality, every local history/narrative will have to survive in diversity; it will have to recover itself, structure itself, and preserve itself, while changing and absorbing.¹¹¹ Pluriversality, conceived from the standpoint of border thinking, thus, calls for hospitality and friendship in relating to others beyond the frontiers established by a totality, a monolingualism, and a universalism that is falsely universal. This is all the more reason in the context of globalization that has brought differences to inhabit the same space in a more interconnected way.

It should be clear by now that identity is found always in relationality and difference. And since we always exist as relational and integrated beings inhabiting multiple identities, Mignolo envisions that local identities/histories would be modified by one another through cross-epistemological conversation requiring a pluritopic rather than a monotopic hermeneutics. A monotopic hermeneutics—that is, a perspective of a homogeneous knowing subject located in a purportedly universal, delocalized, and unsituated no-man’s-land—enshrines the distinction/dichotomy between the knower and the known, the subject and the object studied, the borderland (as the known) and a pure disciplinary subject (the knower) uncontaminated by the border matters s/he describes.¹¹² Pluriversality rather underlines that the space of our existing understood in terms of epistemic locations, is characterized by “their disruption of dichotomies through being

¹¹⁰ Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 85.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 246.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 18.

themselves a dichotomy. This, in other words, is [for Mignolo], the key configuration of border thinking: *thinking from dichotomous concepts rather than ordering the world in dichotomies* (emphasis original). Border thinking, in other words, is logically, a dichotomous locus of enunciation....”¹¹³ Border thinking as thinking from dichotomous concepts which yields macronarratives requires a reconfiguration and transformation of disciplinary scientificity to become trans-disciplinary/cultural, inter-disciplinary/cultural, and multi-disciplinary/cultural. No doubt, intellectuals generating and producing knowledge from subaltern perspectives, have embraced this approach. By and large, border thinking can be said to be a way out of the labyrinth of the clash of civilizations.

The significance of Mignolo’s insight for negotiating the boundaries of difference in our interconnected and globalized world cannot be overemphasized. It has relevance for intercultural, ecumenical, interreligious, feminist, and liberation hermeneutics, as well as for communion ecclesiology, among others. It also resonates to a very large extent with my own thesis of relationality from an African perspective. My Nigerian context as an epistemic space, for instance, is a forced invention of the coloniality of power as a conglomerate of diverse peoples, cultures, languages, histories, epistemologies, and religions, constructed without the consultation or participation of the people. If being Etche-Nigerian is understood, for instance, in terms of epistemic locations, this suggests that the hyphenated Nigerian is more than simply being an Etche or where the Etches are. Rather, it entails the relationships and engagements Etches have with the diversity in the Nigerian space—a conglomerate of diverse cultures, religious faiths, histories, and so forth, which we could also call epistemic centers—at the intersections of encounters with

¹¹³ Ibid., 85.

them. In keeping with this understanding, then Etche-Nigerian space is at the same time Yoruba-, Hausa-, Tiv-, Ogoni-; Catholic-, Muslim-, Protestant-,ATR-space. So to be an Etche-Catholic, for instance, is, by this configuration, to be in such relations as Catholic-Muslim, Catholic-Anglican, Catholic-ATR, and so on. This is what decolonial thought refers to as the dichotomous nature of pluriversal epistemic locations which disrupts dichotomies through being themselves a dichotomy.

The dichotomous nature of border thinking and pluriversality creates a condition of possibility for border thinking in terms of cultural and religious diversity. In terms of interreligious encounter, it creates a possibility for mutual enrichment of faiths rather than trying to conflate or resolve these dichotomous categories into monolingual and homogenous narratives, which, of course, merely renders invisible the coloniality of power still alive and well today. After all, this is not strange to the nature of Christianity. As an organized religion, Christianity is modified by its deep roots in Judaic cosmology, epistemology, history, ethics, and so on. It is also shaped in the formulation of its doctrines by Greco-Roman traditions and philosophies while in turn, the Christian gospel also modified and transformed the aforementioned traditions. It is all these traditions interwoven and cross-fertilized with Christianity that have equally become our own Christian heritage. But this is a process that remains ongoing if Christianity must be relevant for every epistemic location which may not simply be a passive but active recipient of the faith. Hence, these dichotomous forms are constitutive of who we are as Christians. Undoubtedly, it is in relation to such continual and dynamic engagement of Christianity with diverse religious traditions, local histories/ epistemologies, and the situated dichotomous lived experiences of peoples, which invites constant double

translations, pluriversal readings and reinterpretations, that strengthens and clarifies the uniqueness of our faith. Border thinking and pluriversality require that silenced voices and subjugated epistemologies/histories be heard and foregrounded as they contribute to the continual shaping of the Christian tradition (which is supposed to be living and dynamic, not fossilized) through their reasoned reflection on their faith experiences of the divine. Boodoo is on the mark when he says: “If what we call faith cannot/will not generate nor be informed by a production of knowledge that breaks the coloniality of totalizing systems, of idolatry, then that faith is no faith at all, that is ideology.”¹¹⁴ It is difficult not to agree with Boodoo as he further submits: “Our faith must serve and be served by the epistemological perspectives that are generated out of the colonial difference, the dichotomous experiences of our situations, the border thinking that comes from our forced and dislocated spaces.”¹¹⁵ This is the only way to overcome the tyranny of the coloniality of power that, unfortunately, is still alive and well today. In what follows, I will explore an aspect of Etche (African) hospitality which highlights the revelatory nature of hospitality as a locus of epistemic enunciation and, thus, as a site for theological reflection.

4.6 The Etche-African Ritual of Hospitality

Among the Etche, one significant symbolic ritual is the benediction invoked on a family member who is about to embark on a long journey especially to a far away place. I have personally had this experience. Those who preside over this ritual are usually the

¹¹⁴ Boodoo, *Caribbean Theology*,

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

parents and grandparents. The ritual, among other things, involves the taking of a pinch of sand from the ground and imposing them on the right and left big toes of the person about to travel. In the process, there is invocation of God's blessings, peace, safety, and security; the protection of the ancestors as well as a passionate supplication to the person's *chi* to help him/her actualize his/her destiny by bringing the journey to a successful end and at last to bring the person back home safely. During the process of this ritual, God is often invoked by such names as the following: *Chinedu-ije* (God who directs a person's journey), *Chizoba* (God who saves and protects), *Chisom* (God who accompanies a person), *Chinonso* (God who is near), *Chinonyere* (God with a person), *Chidube* (God who leads), *Chikwado* (God who fructifies and brings plans to their fulfillment), *Chibuzo* (God is the way), and so forth. The significance of this ritual is to underscore that God is with the prospective traveler and will be with him/her even in the strange place. In other words, the traveler becomes an embodiment of the divine, and indeed, an icon or sacrament of the divine. Besides, as I pointed out in a previous chapter, in Etche anthropological assumption, the human person is not just ordinary but has a unique relation to God because of the presence of *chi* (spirit) in every human being.¹¹⁶

This particular anthropological assumption also underwrites how the Etche view people from other cultures and places who they encounter. They tend to view such persons as equally accompanied by God and by their *chi* or rather as bearers of the divine. Hence, hospitality among the Etche assumes the nature of a religious concern for the other, especially the stranger who is considered sacred and who, as such, is deemed

¹¹⁶ For an extended and illuminative discussion of this issue, see Chapter 2 of this work above.

revelatory of the divine.¹¹⁷ Hospitality for the Etche is thus not only an ethical practice but also a religious enactment because it is believed to involve a triadic dynamics of host←stranger←God. God passes by in the stranger encountered by the host. God comes to us in the stranger. Therefore, hospitality so understood is not primarily geared either toward the self-actualization of the host or toward what the host stands to gain out of the encounter with the other via reciprocity. Rather a divine and transcendent orientation is the warrant for our human ethical and hospitable responsibility toward the other. For the Etche, the encounter between the host and the guest is considered to always take place in the presence and mediation of the Spirit. God and the Spirit meet us in the guise of strangers who interpellate and challenge our thematizing presuppositions.

This practice of impartation of divine benediction on the prospective traveler as well as the belief in and recognition of the trace or presence of the divine which passes through the stranger or visitor is one that is widespread in most of West Africa. Among the Wum of Cameroon, for example, when a family member is about to travel to a far country, the parents and grand-parents sit down while the person stands before them. The parents and the grandparents then bring the two hands of the person together, forming a cup-like shape and exhaling into the person's palms while pronouncing blessings and good wishes upon him/her. Interestingly, the exhalation resonates with the biblical impartation of the Spirit, the breath of life. God is beseeched to accompany, guide, guard, and to see the traveler to his/her journey's end. In a similar way, the Chribo of Liberia practice exactly the same thing that the Wum people do. With regard to recognizing the divine in the stranger, the Fang of Gabon believe that an ancestral spirit passes by a

¹¹⁷ O. Nwodim, *Galaxy of Stars in Etche Ethnic Nationality* (Owerri: Springfield Publishers, 1999), 15.

stranger who consequently should be given hospitality.¹¹⁸ The same is also true of the Bulsa who believe that ancestral spirits visit them in the form of strangers, orphans, beggars, the sick, and so on, and therefore, they should be treated with kindness.¹¹⁹

In Etche cosmo-religious tradition, hospitality may be said to be given to different categories of persons who are distinguished by different designations. Some of this is based on personal experience. Among different categories of guests, our interest here focuses on the welcome usually given to two kinds: “*obhia*,” and “*oghaghaa*.” An “*obhia*” generally could be an invited, known, and expected guest. Such an *obhia* could be said to be an invested guest. An *obhia* could also be unknown but expected. Upon arrival, an *obhia* is usually given a good treat by the host. To begin with, *obhia* is offered *oji* (kola nut) which is often accompanied with *ose-oji* (alligator pepper), garden egg, and *ngwo* (palm wine) or another kind of drink in the absence of palm wine as a symbol of welcome and acceptance by the host.¹²⁰ An Etche adage says: “*eme obhia oji y’ekwuo hhe okwhoro bia*” which means when the guest is first offered kola nut, that is, welcomed and accepted, then and only then will s/he be able to unpack his message to the host by unveiling the purpose of his mission. What is important to note here is that the enactment of hospitality creates an atmosphere of openness that allows the voice of the stranger or guest to be heard rather than silenced. Of course, apart from the initial offer of kola nuts, the host family cooks delicacies with their best cuisine to entertain an *obhia* and usually in

¹¹⁸ See Uzukwu, “Missiology Today,” 159; see also Gregory I. Olikenyi, *African Hospitality: A Model for the Communication of the Gospel in the African Cultural Context* (Nettetal: Steyler Verlag and Enugu, Nigeria: SNAAP Press, 2001), 105.

¹¹⁹ Olikenyi, *African Hospitality*, 105.

¹²⁰ See Ikechi Nwogu et al, *The History of Etche* (Owerri, Nigeria: Springfield Publishers, 2003), 69-70.

the company and gathering of family and community members.¹²¹

The second category of guests is the “*oghaghaa*.” In Etche conceptual scheme, the concept of *oghaghaa* designates a guest who is a total stranger, unknown, uninvited, and unexpected. The *oghaghaa* is the wayfaring stranger who simply arrives but whom society owes justice and kindness. The concept of *oghaghaa* points to a helpless stranger who has been pushed to a situation of marginality by forces beyond his or her control, but who, nevertheless, deserves to be given a hearing and shown solidarity. To be sure, it is to an *oghaghaa* that true hospitality is given. Etches see in the *oghaghaa* something sacred and will do their best possible to accommodate him/her.¹²² An *oghaghaa* could be someone seeking refuge from oppression, repression, or persecution in his own town or village; a victim of stigmatism and ostracism, famine, or loss of land; a dislocated and displaced person, and so on. Etches are blessed with an abundance of arable land. There have been several cases of those considered *oghaghaa* who have come into the community and have been warmly welcomed by host families and the entire community.¹²³ Such strangers, after telling their stories, have been known to be incorporated into the community where they usually stay for the long haul in terms of undetermined period of time. They have been known to be given a piece of land to cultivate and a house to live in. Again, the men especially have also been known to have married (if they were unmarried before they came) and raised their own children while living in the host community. All of these, especially gifts of land and a house to live in

¹²¹ Ibid., 70.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Nwodin, *Galaxy of Stars*, 20.

are given free of charge to an *oghaghaa* (the stranger). He does not have to pay for the land or give any kind of compensation to either the host family or the community.

As time progresses, the *oghaghaa* gradually comes to some understanding of the ways, the culture, language, traditions, and other aspects of the host community without necessarily losing his alterity even though as an “in-between” dweller, his identity becomes reconfigured. As pointed out above, hospitality entails a certain dynamic fluidity which makes possible the reversibility of roles between host and guest. It is from this standpoint that the presence of the *oghaghaa* who represents a distinct epistemic center contributes in the modification of the host community’s culture/traditions since his perspective is often given a hearing on issues in the community. The stranger can help to point out to us areas in the culture that are less humanizing which are not infrequently taken for granted but nonetheless, need to be addressed.¹²⁴ At any rate, the stranger who has come to live in the community comes to be taken more or less as a member of the community. Eventually, after several years some of them (the *oghaghaas* who choose to) do leave and return to their own home land. What is really our point of interest here is how the *oghaghaa* (who is already the suppressed and silenced) is not doubly silenced again in his host community of refuge. As pointed out above, one of the reasons for this hospitality shown to the *oghaghaa* is the belief that the stranger embodies the divine and, therefore, carries a promise. Hence, the stress it is only through the active role of the host families and community in receiving, accepting, and welcoming the stranger without subjugating or silencing him or her, that the promise embodied by the *oghaghaa* would

¹²⁴ See Stephen B. Beevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, rev. and exp. ed., Faith and Cultures (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 20.

come to pass. To be sure, Etche hospitality is about how we relate to the stranger who is understood to be revelatory of the divine; it is about openness to welcome difference without the violence of trying to shape him or her into our own image or subjugating and silencing his voice.

In the light of the Etche anthropological assumption with regard to the presence of *chi* (spirit) in every person including the stranger, we can better appreciate the significance of their hospitable concern for the *oghaghaa*. The recognition of the presence of the spirit in the *oghaghaa* who approaches serves to awaken in the Etche a sense of responsibility for accepting and sharing the gift of themselves, their land, and home with the stranger. For the Etche, hospitality to the *oghaghaa* is, therefore, not done on the basis of the pedigree, profile, surname, or where s/he comes from, but rather in view of what the stranger represents for them—God or the spirit who comes in the stranger. Hospitality is thus one other way of how the Etche experience the Spirit. Where authentic hospitality is enacted, there the Spirit, nay, the Triune God, is found. For the Etche, hospitality to the stranger becomes a pathway to God and God's pathway to them. Etch hospitality to the *oghaghaa* is thus one excellent way of negotiating the boundaries of difference. Significantly, the model of hospitality pushes relationality beyond the limits of kinship, tribal, and ethnic settings to build solidarity of others who are not of the same ethnic group with us, those who do not share the same blood with us or in the same blood covenant with us. The cardinal imperative for a new, virile, dynamic, and viable model of building relationships beyond the boundaries of ethnicity in Africa today, may be met through the metaphor of hospitality. What has been said here so far does not assume that this manner of hospitality simply comes easy or is achieved instinctively

without taking cognizance of a usual disorientation that encounters with strangers tend to foment in us. The Etche, like all humans, do also have their own fair share of human weaknesses including the tendency to dislike what is the unlike and exclude others who are not like us from the radius of our religious and ethical concern. The truth of the matter, however, remains that their understanding of the divine transcendent orientation of hospitality as the impetus helps invaluable in majority of cases to direct its practice along the right course; to recognize the stranger (*oghaghaa*) as the one whose presence awakens in us a sense of ethical responsibility to accept and share ourselves, our land, our gifts, and community with him or her without, at the same time subjugating or repressing him or her.

Contrary to Derrida, who, for fear of determinacy with its tendency to thematize or degenerate into economic exchange, is more interested in taking flight into vague abstractions and the “absolute,” the Etche hospitality is historically and concretely mediated in the situation of the stranger in need of welcome and recognition. Etche hospitality may not be a perfect one, but it is still better than simply indulging in the near obsessive stress on absolute unconditioned and the radical discontinuity of determinable hospitality à la Derrida. We are always historical and situated beings. And historicity is not the same as or simply reducible to totality. Nor does it necessarily amount to an automatic totalitarian reduction of the other to the regime of sameness. Hospitality, to be realistic, necessarily has to be incarnated and mediated as typified in the Etche brand. Derrida’s position is likened to the skeptic, who driven by an obsessive fear of falling into error, refuses to believe anything including error itself, and thus, risks finding the truth. Therefore, Derrida’s negative theology conflates everything into the absolute while

seemingly turning a blind eye on the need for a concrete constructive hermeneutics of engagement with ambiguity and pluralism that characterize our historically conditioned and situated living and experiences. What is worth noting, however, is that in the two categories of Etche hospitality as we have seen above, the stranger is welcomed as a bearer of the divine. On account of the stranger's revelatory character, s/he is welcomed, recognized, and not silenced in spite of her or his subalternity. Against the backdrop of the whole idea of the divine passing through the stranger—who embodies a promise and thus, an epistemic potential—as the foundation of hospitality, we now take a look at hospitality as an imperative of relational pneumatology.

4.7 Liberative Hospitality as an Imperative of the Relational Spirit

Hospitality from a Scriptural perspective could be said to be always empowered by the Spirit of the hospitable God. In the person of Jesus from Nazareth, the unlimited hospitality of God is incarnated and mediated. It is the Spirit who not only makes possible but also renders present the hospitality of God mediated through the life, works, and paschal mysteries of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As Brendan Byrne suggests, “The whole mission of Jesus...can be summed up in the phrase ‘the hospitality of God.’”¹²⁵ Jesus as the one anointed by the relational Spirit concretizes the hospitality and good news of God in the life of those dislocated and subalternized by the social structures that oppress, subjugate, and silence them. Because the hospitality of God does not remain an absolute unconditioned but is always mediated historically reaching its climax in Jesus,

¹²⁵ Brendan Byrne, *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke's Gospel* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 50. Byrne articulates such a summary of the mission of Jesus, of course, as the title of his book indicates, against the backdrop of Lucan theology and hermeneutic.

John Koenig is right in insisting that a deep link always “exists between the verbal content of God’s good news and its historical embodiment in boundary situations.”¹²⁶

As we noted previously, the Spirit who descended on Jesus at his baptism and rested on him marked his anointing and hence, his empowerment for his messianic role as the one who inaugurates and ushers into the present the eschatological liberative hospitality of God. As one empowered by the Spirit, wherever Jesus exercised his messianic ministry, the hospitality of God was made manifest. This is in conjunction with his inaugural announcement in the synagogue at Nazareth: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Lk 4:18-19). Without succumbing to the traditional tendency of over-spiritualizing this text and depriving it of its critical bite and subversive potential, it is clear that this announcement encapsulates a wider program of social justice and God’s tender hospitality toward the poor, the oppressed, the subalternized, and the silenced. This understanding comes to a sharper focus when we come to appreciate the import of the concept of *aphesis* meaning “release” in Luke’s Gospel. The significance of this concept, in the words of Byrne, “implies that the ministry of Jesus will fulfill the program of social justice that, according to Isa 58:5-7, God required of Israel.”¹²⁷ The release meant here is not merely spiritualized but actually embraces a practical historical liberative dimension to it as is already powerfully reflected

¹²⁶ John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission*, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 86.

¹²⁷ Byrne, *The Hospitality of God*, 48-9.

in Mary's *Magnificat*: "He has put down the mighty from their thrones and lifted up the downtrodden" (see Lk 1:46-55); and as enshrined in the Beatitudes (Lk 6:17-26; see Matt 5:1-12). It was a practical interpretive device employed by Jesus not only as a religious instrument but also as a social one deployed to disturb and challenge the powerful and to restore hope to the powerless and voiceless. In her own case, Mary recognized that she has actually been lifted up and released from her situation of invisibility and inaudibility (which was her lot as a woman under the penumbra shadow of the patriarchal Israelite society of her time) when she asked the heavenly angel Gabriel in the event of the Annunciation: "How can this be?" By posing this all important question, the voice of a woman, a subaltern, for the first time, was given vocality and hearing in the synoptic Gospels.¹²⁸ This is more significant when we realize that Mary's question was posed to a sovereign, a heavenly authority figure, to whom a woman of her lowly status could not ordinarily ask such a question (except through the man, her husband) at the time. Besides, Mary's question is less a suggestion of doubt than it is of her wanting to be clarified on her role and contribution toward the concrete embodiment of Jesus in the flesh. This is a typical example of the cracking of coloniality and the unsubjugation and foregrounding of a silenced epistemic potential of a subaltern. The irruption of the angel became a moment of crack in the system of repression which allowed for the enunciation of Mary's epistemic potential and destiny. Therefore, the good news which Jesus preaches to the most isolated and ignored does not remain mere words but actually effects a change by lifting the oppressed and repressed from a situation of marginality and marginalization to

¹²⁸ Caroline N. Mbonu, *Handmaid: The Power of Names in Theology and Society* (Oregon, Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 46-7.

reclaim their dignity and equality-in-difference. Thus, as the bearer of God's liberative hospitality, Jesus dismantles and dethrones all the mighty structures that dominate and repress the underdogs, and in turn lifts up the downtrodden, the subaltern, and the silenced, from the frontiers of the shadows of invisibility and inaudibility to foreground and legitimize their epistemic potential. The subaltern, like Mary, also has a contribution to make in bringing to the world and in the shaping of our dynamic faith tradition.

As a background to our understanding of the import of Jesus' hospitality toward the margins, it may be helpful to briefly investigate the import of hospitality in the First Testament (OT). The OT repeatedly returns to the motif: "You shall not oppress the stranger, for you know the heart of the stranger—you yourselves were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Ex 23:9). Again, "When a stranger lives with you in your land, do not ill-treat him" (Lev 19:33). Hospitality was also understood to be revelatory of the divine. Abraham and Sarah upon welcoming the three strangers did not know they were showing hospitality to God (Gen 18:1-15; cf. Heb 13:2). This valorizes the theological significance of the stranger as an epistemic center and a site of revelation. Indeed, this Abrahamic role as an ideal host who welcomed the irruption of the divine in the strangers became archetypal in ancient Judaism.¹²⁹

However, as time progressed, "a number of forces—socioeconomic, political, and religious—worked to...[diminish or preclude the practice of hospitality]. In diverse ways

¹²⁹ Even Jesus recognizes this archetypal role of Abraham as a host as Jesus himself makes allusions to it in some of his sayings. For example, in Matthew 8:11-12, Jesus alludes to the fact that "many will come from east and west and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the feast in the kingdom of heaven; but the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown out into the darkness, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth." Again, in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, Abraham is depicted as the chief host in which heaven is referred to as "Abraham's bosom" (see Lk 16:19-31).

Palestinian Judaism prior to 70 C. E. suffered from tendencies toward exclusivism.”¹³⁰ For example, many of the purity ritual laws (cf. Lev 12-19) came to be translated and interpreted in such ways as to regulate and set limits to the encounter and interaction with those considered unclean. Those who were considered ritually unclean, the likes of lepers, hemorrhaging women, and Gentiles or pagans, were to have nothing to do with the community of the people in the name of purity of tradition.¹³¹ At some point, these purity ritual laws became ideological, and were instrumentalized by the powerful religious authorities to oppress and repress, to exclude and denigrate certain categories of people in the Israelite community. Among other things, it is this anomaly that the hospitality of Jesus serves as a scathing condemnation and aims to dismantle.

Equipped for his messianic mission with the power of the Spirit, Jesus would engage the powerful entrenched forces that seek to oppress, silence, and deprive all those excluded and marginalized, of their God-given human dignity.¹³² On various occasions, therefore, through his actions and words, Jesus challenged and condemned the oppressive religious, political, and socio-economic structures of his day. In keeping with such a stance, Jesus went out of his way to challenge “exclusivism wherever it was officially sanctioned or accepted as normal. Above all, the challenge is dramatized in stories about Jesus’ association at table with the marginal people known as tax collectors and

¹³⁰ Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*, 19-20.

¹³¹ For an extended discussion of the divergent views concerning the limits of the treatment of strangers in the Old Dispensation, see Daniel Smith-Christopher, “Between Ezra and Isaiah: Exclusion, Transformation, and Inclusion of the ‘Foreigner’ in Post-Exilic Biblical Theology,” in *Ethnicity and the Bible*, ed. Mark Brett (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 117-42.

¹³² See Byrne, *The Hospitality of God*, 41.

sinners.”¹³³

In many cases, Jesus would be both a *guest* of, and a *host* to those regarded by the religious tradition as “sinners”—tax collectors, publicans, and prostitutes (cf. Matt 9:9-13; Mk 2:13-17; Lk 5:27-32; 7:36-50). Jesus touched and healed lepers who were declared untouchable and quarantined outside the community, silenced and not allowed to communicate with any body for the sake of not contaminating ritual purity (cf. Mk 1:40-45). What is interesting to note here, especially in the case of Zaccheus, the tax collector (Lk 19:1-10), and the leper, after Jesus had released them from their repressed situations, for the first time in the Bible, their voices are heard. For the first time, we hear the silenced voice of Zaccheus: “But Zaccheus stood up and said to the Lord, ‘Look Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor.’” In the case of the leper, although Jesus had asked him not to tell anyone about his healing except the priest; “However, as soon as the man went out, he began spreading the news everywhere.” From their individual experiences of the Lord in their own unique situations, they have a story to narrate which must not be silenced. This is what the relational and liberative hospitality of God is about. Joachim Jeremias writes, “The inclusion of sinners in the community of salvation, achieved in table-fellowship, is the most meaningful expression of the message of the redeeming love of God.”¹³⁴ This redeeming or liberative love of God expressed through the hospitality of Jesus aims at the restitution of such excluded, silenced groups and persons who deserved to be recognized and heard. In this way, the inclusive hospitality of Jesus is subversive and condemnatory of the structures of

¹³³ Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*, 20.

¹³⁴ Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, cited in Bretherton, *Hospitality as Holiness*, 129.

oppression and repression.

Furthermore, it is the same point that is underscored in the parable of the great banquet organized by a king for his son. In this parable, Jesus aims to dismantle the social structures that perpetuate the ignoring of those who are already marginalized and subalternized by society. Hence, the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind who were among the oppressed and marginalized in the world of ancient Judaism were all brought in to partake of the meal (cf. Lk 14:15-24; Matt 22:1-14). In this parable, Jesus relativizes all classificatory structures that denigrate, ignore, and stifle the epistemic potentials of the repressed and excluded. The margins are at last given the chance to become visible to reclaim their equality-in-difference in the kingdom fellowship. Jesus' hospitality here entails a dethroning of the system of domination. In all these instances, Jesus demonstrates by his actions and words that the hospitality of God does not exclude anyone; that the margins constitute a privileged place of divine irruption that should be recognized and heard.

This point is further orchestrated in Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well. The Hebrew people treated the Samaritans as despised aliens who do not possess the God of Israel. Plus, she was also a woman (who had no place in the scheme of things in the society). But Jesus as the one empowered by the relational Spirit dismantled the barriers of both ethnic and male chauvinism and reached out to the Samaritan and extended God's hospitality to her (Jn 4:1-42). After her experience of Jesus in her situation, for the first time, her voice was given vocality and hearing as she told the whole town the gospel about Jesus. Jesus unsubjected and lifted her from marginality to the foreground. Again, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus

projected the Samaritan as the one who acted as a true neighbor to the stranger robbed, beaten, and left half dead. The story of the kindness and hospitality of the Good Samaritan by Jesus is aimed at condemning the social and religious structures and institutions that perpetuated exclusion and repression. For the sake of purity of tradition and ritual cleanness, the priest and Levite ignored an act of kindness to a half-dead man when he most needed assistance and support. For the sake of purity of tradition, those viewed as outsiders are often ignored and excluded. At worst, they are thematized and totalized by being reduced into the regime of sameness. Indeed, purity of tradition, if there is such a thing, is an illusion of ideological and totalitarian systems. Is it any surprise that in the name of pure Christian tradition, authentic canon, translation, and interpretation, the epistemic potentials and voices of the already silenced subalterns have continued to be silenced today? Goodness, kindness, excellent cultural values and treasures, can also be learned from the subaltern, the outsider as typified by the Good Samaritan. No one person, group, or tradition has a monopoly of goodness and truth. God's grace and gift of holiness is not limited to any one particular group of people or tradition. This invites pluriversality and a plurality of traditions that allows for the voices of the silenced, the values of subjugated and subalternized epistemic locations, to be foregrounded, legitimized, and heard. Therefore, God's hospitality as embodied by Jesus—the one anointed and empowered by the Spirit—is inclusive, subversive, and prophetic. Its inclusion of those denigrated, marginalized, and oppressed by the entrenched forces that seek to impoverish their dignity means that true hospitality is life-giving and life-affirming. Its prophetic stance seeks to subvert, to challenge, to overthrow, and to transform whatever structures that generate oppression, exclusion, and

thwart human dignity. In this sense, hospitality is also liberative and redemptive.

It is in the light of scenes as the ones just pointed out that Jesus would begin to get into conflicts with the domination system. The increasing conflict between Jesus—on account of his inclusive, interpellatory, and prophetic hospitality—and the entrenched powerful forces that ruled his world climaxed in the crucifixion. He was murdered for daring to be in solidarity of subalterns and for speaking from the wound of colonial difference and subalternity, when he should be silent. He was killed for not preserving the oppressive and suppressive religious practices of the system of purity and holiness.¹³⁵ Indeed, the cross is the height of Jesus' hospitality to and solidarity of the margins where he gave the superabundant and supreme gift of himself for their sake. On the cross, Jesus ends the circle of economy of exchange and indebtedness. On the cross he ultimately dissipated himself completely for others to the point of giving his own life in their place. But before he suffered, Jesus dramatized and sacramentalized this immeasurable self-gift as a testimony of his credible love and friendship in the Eucharist. Let me now talk a little bit on the Eucharist in relation to hospitality.

4.7.1 The Eucharist and Hospitality

In the Eucharist and on the cross, Jesus proved, contra Derrida, that unconditional and unlimited gift giving and hospitality is an impossible possibility since God makes the impossible possible. In a sense, the Eucharist as the sacrament of Jesus' gratuitous total self-gift for the salvation of the community is the highest form of hospitality and

¹³⁵ Albert Nolan, *God in South Africa: The Challenge of the Gospel* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1988), 215.

friendship. Greater love has no one than to give his life for his friends (cf. Jn 15:13). The Derridean standpoint with regard to the impossibility of the gift and hospitality because they are unrepresentable and unrealizable within the parameters of historico-temporal determinacy is precisely what is made present in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the sacrament of Jesus' love, hospitality, and friendship. Both as sacramentalized in the Eucharist and as enacted on the cross, the hospitality and friendship of Jesus are not left as abstract absolutes but are actually mediated and made concrete in history without diminution or reduction to the regime of economy. The notion of gift with regard to the divine is one with a profound theological import. Theologically, divine gift is another name for grace. And by nature, grace is that which is a "non-value," a "non-worth," a "non-object," or that which is unquantifiable, incalculable, immeasurable, ungraspable, and always excess. That is why grace is said to be constituted by gratuitousness and graciousness. It is gratuitous because given free of charge and gracious because unlimited. God's self-gift as grace (non-object) means that the transcendent-immanent, the absent-present God, is nothing of what is. It is precisely because God is nothing of what is, that God must "become." God continues to become but never arrives, never reducible to a finished-product which would amount to objectification. Because God continues to become, he becomes through a symbolic or iconic body in which to presence himself without being identical with the icon. The icon becomes only a translucent mirror through which God presences by gradually saturating it without being consigned to the measure of our gaze on the icon as in the case of an idol.¹³⁶ The historical Jesus from

¹³⁶ See Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), esp. chap. 1.

Nazareth is thus the *Ursakrament* (original or primordial sacrament) who iconizes God and through whom God becomes body. In the Eucharist God continues to become but never finishes coming. Through the Eucharistic double epiclesis, the bread (gift of the earth and work of human hands) and the assembled community, become the body of Christ. In the Eucharist, God continues to become both cosmic and human body. The God who is distant and absent is the one who is near and presences in the Eucharist. Since it is the Spirit who edifies the church, the sacraments of the church including the Eucharist, are both gift and grace of the Holy Spirit.¹³⁷

Again, as the Messiah, Jesus' relationship to others is not about conquest and domination as it is about liberation, subversion, and transformation of unjust social and religious structures that diminish life. During the Last Supper, when Jesus instituted the Eucharist in the power of the Spirit, after washing the feet of the disciples, in a long discourse, Jesus spoke his final words to them concerning his impending death, the coming of the Spirit, and how they are to live and relate to one another. In a very moving way, Jesus calls his followers, "friends" especially because of the openness in his relationship with them. He did not hide from them anything he has learned from the Father. Relationality, hospitality, and friendship, require that openness and honesty exist between parties engaged in a relationship in the recognition of their equality-in-difference. In genuine friendship, self-sacrifice for the sake of one's friend rather than totalization is key to lasting relationships. Because he regards his followers as his friends, Jesus could say "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his

¹³⁷ See the document of the Joint Commission for the Theological Dialogue Between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, *Faith, Sacraments, and the Unity of the Church* (June 1987), § 15.

friends” (Jn 15:13). Jesus chose the disciples and also elevated them to the level of friends. What friends do for each other is self-emptying for the sake of the other. This is what Jesus commands his friends to do: ““You are my friends if you do what I command.’ ‘My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you”” (Jn 15:14,12). He loved by his willingness to lay down his life for their sake. Thus, the friendship that Jesus recommends for his followers is one that is self-sacrificial and non-totalizing. Jesus’ example is, therefore, meant to teach the disciples the radicality of God’s relational engagement with humanity as one of friendship. This is the pattern and vision the followers of Jesus are to imitate in their relations to others. They are to relate and engage others who also are God’s friends especially those at the margins, including non-Christians on the model of friendship and hospitality. Jesus’ hospitality and friendship constitute the model and the condition of possibility for Christian hospitality and friendship.

The reality of the Eucharist thus grounds our hope and is a spur for our striving toward the achieving of unconditional gift and hospitality. Jesus’ self-gift in the Eucharist symbolized by material bread and wine is a sign that God’s hospitality cares about and takes seriously what happens to the human person (who is a composite of body, soul, and spirit with intellectual, intuitional, emotive, psychological, and other dimensions). Jesus gave his life that the community may be saved. But then, God’s gracious self-gift in Christ, is both a gratuity and a task. It challenges and calls us to express God’s hospitality not only toward others (by flourishing the life of all and eliminating all unjust and death-dealing institutions) but also toward all of God’s creation and our environment.¹³⁸ In the

¹³⁸ See Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 114; see also Heb 13:14.

gift of the Eucharist, we also become the “flesh of Christ” in order to share intimately in the situations and struggles of those who are being oppressed, silenced, and subalternized by social structures and to bring them release (*aphesis*) as Jesus did.

To carry out this task of hospitality, the church is totally dependent on the Spirit. As Thomas Hughson writes, “Invoking the Spirit expresses and enacts a constitutive and constant dependence of the eucharistic community and presider on the Spirit for the transformation of the gifts, no less than the institution narrative expresses and manifests continuity with Christ’s words and acts at the Last Supper.”¹³⁹ The Eucharistic epiclesis thus displays the nature of the church as one which is constitutively and constantly dependent on the Spirit in ever-new fidelity to Christ. Hence, the Spirit empowers the members of the Eucharistic community as the body of Christ with gifts to bear witness to the hospitality of God embodied in the Eucharist. The gifts of the Spirit are for creativity, for service to others, and for building up the community. Since all have been gifted, hospitality requires that these gifts (whether of individuals, groups, or local traditions, etc.) be recognized and not subjugated and silenced. This means that the Spirit is not a possession of the church as a piece of property. Nor is the Spirit merely at the disposal of the church as its divine assistant, albeit, the church “can and may ask for the coming of the Holy Spirit and can be certain that this plea will be heard.”¹⁴⁰ But always, the church “exists and acts in all aspects and dimensions in radical dependence on the somewhat

¹³⁹ Thomas Hughson, “Interpreting Vatican II: ‘A New Pentecost,’” *Theological Studies* 69 (2008):3-37 at 26.

¹⁴⁰ Walter Kasper, “The Renewal of Pneumatology in Contemporary Catholic Life and Thought,” in *The Holy Spirit, The Church, and Christian Unity: Proceedings of the Consultation Held at the Monastery of Bose, Italy (14-20 October 2002)*, ed. D. Donnelly, A. Deneux, and J. Famerée (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2005), 22, cited in *Ibid.*, 27.

unpredictable action of the Spirit...”¹⁴¹

The Eucharist is reconciliatory by nature. It reconciles us to one another as members of the one body and to God. As Paul puts it, “But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who...has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility [which separated us]” (Eph 2:13-15). Furthermore, “He destroyed hatred and reconciled us...to God through the cross, making...[us] one body” (Eph 2:16). With all this in mind, Paul then underscores an all important point: “consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household” (Eph 2:19). In the power of the Spirit, Eucharistic hospitality builds relationships across differences making it possible for all to feel welcomed in God’s household. The Spirit who accomplishes the Eucharist is thus the power “of fluidity that permeates or circumnavigates the barricades of impossibility we erect.”¹⁴² In the Eucharist we are built into a community, a fruitful communion that honors equality-in-difference. As a community built out of equality-in-difference, it requires that no person’s charisms or group cultural values and local epistemologies be subjugated and subalternized by a regime of the colonality of power. The relational Universal Spirit who blows where she wills and bestows gifts freely is also present and actively at work in the region of colonial difference where border thinking takes place.

It is the relational Spirit who makes it possible for us to crisscross the boundaries of our differences and engenders understanding across differences. This is exactly the gift

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 26.

¹⁴² Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*, 134.

that the Spirit bestowed on the church on the day of Pentecost. The Spirit's gift of *polyglossia* at Pentecost shattered the imperialistic and totalizing monolingualism of Babel and restored the beauty of pluriversality to its rightful place (Acts 2:1-18). With the gift of *polyglossia* at Pentecost, the Spirit empowers the church to welcome pluriversality by creating space for macronarratives and fostering equality-in-difference. Indeed, it was this marvel of plurilinguism by the Spirit at Pentecost that jolted the church into mission *ad gentes*. The challenges and opportunities which difference presents become for the church through the power of the Spirit always an occasion for coming to a new understanding through constant rereading of the Bible, translation, and reinterpretation. Any claim to a static authentic interpretation with a universal application irrespective of distinct local histories and situated lived experiences becomes not only ideological but reinscribes and supports the totalizing discourse of the colonality of power. The tongues of fire of the Pentecostal Holy Spirit are many and pluriversal. When the tongues of fire rested on each of the disciples, filled with the Holy Spirit, they began to speak other languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak. Everyone in the crowd consisting of diverse groups from the different parts of the world who heard them were excited because each heard them speaking and proclaiming in their own native language, what God, the Savior does. A hermeneutic of hospitality as an imperative of the relational Spirit's economy of abundance (a plurality of gifts for many and different Christian practices and services for the good of others and the world) thus upends the spiral of the economy of exchange and indebtedness. As members of the body of Christ and as those who become the Eucharistic body of Christ through the epiclesis of the Spirit, we, and the church, continue to be gifted by the relational Spirit for hospitality and friendship.

4.8 Hospitality and Eschatology

Already we have established that Christian hospitality which entails a transformative encounter with the stranger is an imperative of the relational Spirit. The same Spirit who anointed and empowered Jesus to be the embodiment of God's abundant and inclusive hospitality also empowered the church at Pentecost to participate in and embody divine hospitality in its relations to others. Through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, the reign of God has already been inaugurated while awaiting its eschatological fulfillment. The relational Spirit poured out on Pentecost makes participation in God's hospitality possible. The church bears witness to this possibility through its hospitable practices toward those usually considered outsiders by working out their release from what oppresses and silences them.¹⁴³

The imperative of the Spirit to bear witness to God's hospitality reminds the church of the need to be open to pluriversality of macronarratives and to the dignity of equality-in-difference in a World Christianity today. The church can still carry out its mission without necessarily reducing everyone to the regime of the same through the colonality of power (which would involve doing violence to subaltern local histories and epistemologies through totalization). As we noted earlier, the impossibility of absolute and pure hospitality is what has been made possible in Jesus and in his gift of the Eucharist. For the church, however, hospitality as embodied in the Eucharist remains an eschatological ideal and a lure as the church continually and anticipatorily strives toward the eschaton in its historical situatedness and particularity. While presently inhabiting the "in-between" of the eschatological tension, the church and the members of the body of

¹⁴³ Bretherton, *Hospitality as Holiness*, 143.

Christ are challenged to ceaselessly and unflinchingly witness to the eschatological but liberative hospitality of God concretized in the work of peace, justice, and righteousness in a globalized but fragmented world of violence and conflicts. As those who have been loved and made friends of God, we are called to join in the divine mutual ecstatic dance of love (*perichoresis*) and propagate divine hospitality in the world. It is in the nature of dance to alluring and contagious. An Igbo aphorism puts it succinctly: “*onye amaghi agba, y’ekwewe n’isi*” meaning “even if one does not know the dance step, the lure of the dance makes one join by nodding one’s head. The relational Spirit ushers us into a divine milieu of mutual dance of love in order that we might embody the dance and transform the world into the kingdom. By joining in the divine dance, we embody it and continue to open it out to the world. Socio-cosmic disharmony results when human beings who are not only destined for the Triune dance but who have actually been swept into the dance refuse to gyrate according to the rhythm, and instead introduce a counter-rhythm through unjust relationships, exploitation, oppression, and repression. Hospitality as a model holds enormous promise that is relevant for constructing an African theology that takes Africans’ situated lived experiences and histories seriously.

4.9 Conclusion

In this chapter we have examined the importance of the model of hospitality as a practical framework for negotiating the boundaries of difference. We investigated the nuances which distinguish true and genuine hospitality/friendship from covenant and a relationship driven by the desire and quest for self-actualization. From the vantage point of its revelatory, interpellatory, and fluid character, hospitality is best enacted in the “in-between,” in the border or the space of colonial difference where border thinking takes

place to unsubjagate subalternized voices and local histories/epistemologies through the coloniality of power. It is this understanding that we find behind the practice of hospitality by Jesus which climaxed in the complete gift of himself for the salvation of others and sacramentalized in the Eucharist. For the church, hospitality is thus both a gift and a task. The model of hospitality still holds enormous potential for the transformation of imagination that would usher in social transformation especially as it concerns Africa. At any rate, hospitality remains an eschatological ideal to which the church strives while presently coursing through the tensive eschatological ‘in-between.’”

Chapter 5

Toward an African Christian Relational Pneumatology: Significance for Being Church Today

5.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapters, I have tried to establish from both biblical and Christian traditions how the Holy Spirit is the Lord and the Giver of life. It has also been our task to seek a reinterpretation and a rearticulation of this confession in a way that allows for new understandings of the Holy Spirit in order to elicit its relevance for being church in present day Africa in the context of the ambiguities of globalization. In this chapter, we will look at the Universal Holy Spirit in the light of the multiplicity of spirits in West African world-views in order to gain new understandings about the Spirit. We shall examine the mission of the Spirit as distinct from that of Christ in order to focus our discussion. Toward constructing an African relational pneumatology, we shall be drawing and building on the insights of African Initiated Churches (AICs). The implications of this pneumatology for being church in postcolonial Nigeria and Africa today would be explored. And finally, we shall investigate a way forward for African theology.

5.2 The Holy Spirit and Other spirits in the World

As the Giver of life, the Spirit of God is the Creator and sustainer of all life forms including human life in the world. Not only this, the work of the Spirit in the world also entails resisting all life-negating forces that try to diminish and impoverish life. Thus, as Lord, the Spirit is the resistant and prophetic power of God for liberation and salvation not only from sin but also from all manifestations of the destructive effects of sin

particularly as they affect the poor, the marginalized, the oppressed, and the exploited. All this is a way of showing how the Spirit of God is involved in and with the world. Notwithstanding the fact of her own hypostatic entitative reality, the Holy Spirit is, clearly, a way of referring to God's universal presence and active working in the world. As pointed out previously, God is immanent in all things through the Spirit. The Spirit who anointed and empowered Jesus for his redemptive work is one and the same as the life-giving *rûah Elohim* who birthed creation into being. Indeed, Jacques Dupuis is right when he writes: "The immanent presence of the Holy Spirit is always and in all circumstances the reality of God's saving grace."¹ As I had already made clear, we shall be using both the personal and impersonal properties in talking about the Personhood of the Holy Spirit since the Bible allows for both ways of expression.

If the Universal Holy Spirit has been pervasively present in the whole world before the incarnation of the divine Logos, how do we make a sense of the awareness of the existence of "other spirits" predominant in the spirit-world of other cosmo-religious world-views and traditions in the world? Do these "other spirits" have anything to do with the Universal Holy Spirit and if so, could they shed a different light on biblical data and perhaps challenge the traditional paradigm with regard to our understanding of the Spirit's activity in religions, cultures, and history in general? Or are they mutually exclusive and opposed to each other? How can talk about the Holy Spirit become meaningful within the context of other "distinctive cultural understandings of 'spirit'"² or

¹ Jacques Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2006), 83.

² Kirsteen Kim, *The Holy Spirit in the World: A Global Conversation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2007), 2.

“spirits” as the case may be? In what follows, I shall re-examine some materials from the Bible and Patristic tradition as well as certain scholarly endeavors that would help us to broach an other understanding of the relationship between the Holy Spirit and “other spirits.” The goal here is to establish that there exists a precedence in the Bible and early tradition with regard to how to construe the relationship between the Holy Spirit and other spirits. This approach will be helpful toward an understanding of how it is that the Universal Holy Spirit has been actively present and at work in cultures, religions, and world-views outside the boundaries of Christianity. It should also be kept in mind that the “other spirits” in question here are not to be understood according to the Christian conception of “demons” in the sense of spirits opposed to God. Rather, we have in mind spirits that are conceived as compatible with (and in some cases as the modalities of) the dynamic hierarchy of the Supreme God.

In the first place, there is no doubt, according to the Christian confession, that Jesus is the *definitive* revelation of God. However, it is legitimately arguable that Jesus is not the *exclusive* revelation of God. As Gavin D’Costa suggests, “Jesus is called *totus Deus*, never *totum Dei*; wholly God, but never the whole of God.”³ While Jesus is wholly God, he is neither the Father nor the Spirit. Nor is he the entire Trinity personified. God is more than the person of Jesus because the Triune God also includes the Persons of the Father and the Spirit. Jesus as the definitive revealer of the Father—whom no one has ever seen—is the Way and the one who leads us to the Father in the Spirit: “Whoever sees me sees the Father” (Jn 14:9). But such revelation “is never completely exhausted in

³ Gavin D’Costa, “Christ, the Trinity and Religious Plurality,” in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. Gavin D’Costa (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 18.

history.”⁴ As Jesus says to his disciples, “I still have many things to tell you, but you cannot bear them now. When he, the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into the whole truth” (Jn 16:12). Again, as I indicated in Chapter 2, albeit Jesus is the definitive revelation of God insofar as the incarnation is concerned (in that there would not be a second incarnation), but precisely as the *eikon* of God, this revelation cannot be exhausted in history by the church at any time. Therefore, in spite of the definitive self-disclosure of God in Jesus, the complexity of such revelation invites the awareness that God still maintains his mysterious and hidden quality as well as his distance and otherness from humans even in the person of Jesus Christ. Besides, it is also legitimate to say that the particularity and historicity of the humanity of Jesus from Nazareth in all its Jewishness could not have exhausted all about the divine pre-Incarnate Logos. Consequently, no single or particular group of traditions, neither Jewish, Greco-Roman, nor African can completely appropriate the holy mystery that God is. It is through the universality and pervasive presence of the Spirit, blowing where she wills (Jn 3:8), that she “constantly and in surprising ways calls us into deeper understanding of God in Christ.”⁵ The Spirit plays this role, albeit, without focusing attention on herself. The Spirit is rather the light in which we see light. It is in the Spirit that we see, know, and have access to Christ and through him (Christ) to the Father. The Spirit is indeed our true access to the Triune God. Thus, as the Lord and Giver of Life, it is the relational Spirit who creates, empowers, and relates to each creature, “bringing each [and all creation]

⁴ Ibid., 18-19.

⁵ Ibid., 19.

into communion with the Trinity.”⁶ In order to gain some helpful understanding about the relationship between the Holy Spirit and “other spirits” particularly in Etche -West African cosmo-religious universe, let us first examine the church’s emergent understanding with regard to the presence and operation of the Universal Holy Spirit in the world and in non-Christian religions.

5.2.1 Vatican II and Beyond: The Church’s Emergent Understanding of the Universal Spirit

When, in his December 25, 1961 apostolic constitution, *Humanae salutis* (Of Human Salvation), pope John XXIII set out to convoke Vatican II, he set the tone and tenor of the council within the horizon of “a new Pentecost.” In the prayer dedicated to the opening of the council, the pope made a plea to the Holy Spirit: “Renew your wonders in our time, as though for a new Pentecost.”⁷ With this plea, the entire proceedings and outcomes of the council were placed under the horizon and influence of the Spirit with an abiding trust that the Holy Spirit would not fail to direct the deliberations and orientations of the general councils. This plea appears to be grounded in the enduring belief that the Spirit unceasingly brings about newness. Hence, the prayer for a new Pentecost was not merely a plea for a repetition of the original event but stemmed from a conviction that Pentecost is ongoing. Therefore, John XXIII had in mind, unlike previous councils, a council whose preoccupation would not simply be definition of dogmas and clarification of disciplines. This approach, to be sure, did not

⁶ Denis Edwards, “For Your Immortal Spirit Is in All Things: The Role of the Spirit in Creation,” in *Earth Revealing, Earth Healing: Ecology and Christian Theology*, ed. Denis Edwards (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 53.

⁷ John XXIII, *Humanae salutis*, in *Documents of Vatican II*, gen. ed. Walter M. Abbott, trans. ed. Joseph Gallagher (New York: Guild, 1966), 709.

emanate from any disdain for dogma, doctrine, or church discipline. Rather, taking their validity for granted, the pope envisioned a pastoral council for the renewal/reform (*aggiornamento*) in the self-understanding of the church and its relations to its otherness in the light of new conditions and “signs of the times” in the modern world that is both historical and natural. Through the invocation for a new Pentecost, the pope placed this vision of *aggiornamento* under the domain of the Spirit’s sway and leadership with the realization that the Spirit is the protagonist and agent of newness and renewal.

But in spite of the preponderant attention given to the Spirit in the beginning and all through the council, precisely as not a dogmatic council, there was not a dogmatic and systematic treatment of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Although, references to the Holy Spirit appear at least 258 times in the entire gamut of the council documents, such sheer enumeration does not, in and of itself, according Yves Congar, yield a conciliar Pneumatology.⁸ Out of the 16 conciliar documents, Congar, however, goes on to identify six of what he calls “elements of true pneumatology that were present at the Second Vatican Council.”⁹ They include: (1) the Christological reference to the Spirit as the Spirit of Christ; (2) the communal structure of the church serves Christ’s Spirit; (3) a trinitarian view of the economy of creation and grace; (4) the Spirit as source of charisms, renewal, and coconstitutive of the church; (5) the Spirit as the principle of the communion of local churches; and (6) a certain recognition of the Spirit already active in history

⁸ Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 1, part 2, trans. David Smith (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1983), 167.

⁹ Ibid.

before the recapitulation in Christ.¹⁰

Of particular interest to us is the last element mentioned by Congar. In several places in different documents, the council speaks, for instance, of the Spirit of the Lord “who fills the whole earth;”¹¹ “who directs the unfolding of time and renews the face of the earth, and who is not absent from this development;”¹² who “was at work in the world before Christ was glorified;”¹³ and “who works on man and turns him toward God.”¹⁴ Additionally, the council developed some positive view of other religions and cultures as containing “elements of truth and grace,” and hence can be salvific.¹⁵ In keeping with this positive attitude, the church vouches to reject “nothing of what is true and holy in these religions;”¹⁶ and exhorts Christians that, “while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, [they should] acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture.”¹⁷ But one thing, however, remains important to be noted. In spite of this positive outlook and recognition of the presence of grace and truth in the beliefs, rituals, religious sense, human values, virtuous

¹⁰ Ibid., 167-72.

¹¹ Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Guadium et Spes* (henceforth GS), 11; Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (henceforth PO), 22, in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, vol. 1, rev. ed., ed. Austin Flannery (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1988).

¹² GS 26.

¹³ Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity, *Ad Gentes Divinitus* (henceforth AG), 4, in *Vatican Council II*.

¹⁴ GS 41.

¹⁵ AG 9; cf. *Lumen Gentium* 16.

¹⁶ Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate* (henceforth NA), 2, in *Vatican Council II*.

¹⁷ Ibid.

practices, treasures of wisdom, hospitable and moral living of other religions which guide their adherents to God, the council still views them as merely partial, temporary, and, therefore, defective. For the council, regardless of all of these fruits and values which can only be attributed to the active presence of the Universal Spirit, the other religions, as preparations for the Gospel, are only straining and reaching toward their true completion and fulfillment in Christianity and more precisely, in the one church (Roman Catholic) of Christ. In other words, according to this fulfillment model which provided the *gestalt* for the council's thinking, unknown to these religions and their adherents, is the assumption that the presence of elements of truth and grace in them ultimately comes from Christ and orient them toward the one church of Christ. This reservation on the part of the church comes to expression in one of the conciliar documents on the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: "For since Christ died for all people, and since the ultimate vocation of the human race is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every person [including non-Christians] the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery."¹⁸ This positive acknowledgement on the part of the church that "the Holy Spirit [who] in a manner known only to God," invisibly but actively offers grace in all peoples and religions, points, at least implicitly to the possibility of salvation for people outside the boundaries of the church's word, sacrament, and apostolic ministry. This is also in connection with the universal salvific will of God. But after all is said and done, the council's thinking shaped by the fulfillment model still maintains that the presence of saving mystery and grace to all peoples (and far less explicit, to all religions) remains the saving mystery of

¹⁸ GS 22.

Christ requiring the necessity of the church (Catholic) as the ordinary means of salvation. What this comes down to, according to this theory, is that the elements of truth and grace present in the “others” and their religio-cultural traditions are already found in Christianity and superabundantly in the Catholic Church. Put another way, there is nothing fundamentally different or new in these “others” that is not already found in superabundance in the church. This appears to be the much that the council could cautiously say with regard to the Universal Spirit of God who fills the whole world and is thus, present and active in non-Christian religions. Postconciliar theology, nonetheless, developed a greater sensitivity toward the “others” and their religio-cultural traditions. Along this line, Karl Rahner’s influence which contains a seminal insight, among others, remains pivotal though not without its own pitfalls. The shape of Rahner’s argument looks like this:

Given that human beings are not pure individual spirits but embodied spirits -in-the-world with a social nature, all their relationships are mediated through the structures present in their society at any historical moment. The same holds true for relationship with God. It is quite unthinkable that salvation could be achieved as a private, interior reality outside of the religious bodies in the environment in which people live. Since experience of the divine is embodied in the creeds, rituals, and moral codes of religious traditions, these concrete religions necessarily become the mediation of salvation in various cultures.¹⁹

This Rahnerian approach, on all counts, expresses a deeper sensitivity toward the “others” and their traditions. It amounts to a seminal but significant and real acknowledgement of the reality of religious pluralism. However, it is not as innocent as it seems. For what forms the infrastructure with regard to Rahner’s edifice is the “inclusive

¹⁹ Referenced in Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (New York and London: Continuum, 2011), 157.

presence of Christ” model. Thus, in spite of his remarkable insight and apparent openness to the otherness of other religions, Rahner could not disentangle himself from what has come down as the requirement of the invested central affirmation of the Christian faith. This key affirmation is conceived as the mystery of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the universal Savior of all humankind. For Rahner, this mystery is already operative in all religions such that members of other religions are saved in Christ, albeit, not despite but through their own religious practice and belief. Precisely as the epitome of embodied spirit par excellence via the incarnation, the movement of God toward humanity and of human transcendentality toward God finds its climatic expression in Jesus Christ who is mysteriously present in every religion. Because this human transcendentality toward God, according to Rahner’s transcendental theological anthropology, is an existential condition in which it is created, all human persons are caught up in a “supernatural existential” transcendence toward union with God. This movement toward union with God is not the result of a natural desire or search, or for that matter, a yearning for God. Rather, it is created by God freely and graciously in the human person and destined for God. Consequently, Rahner opines that all human beings—who may not become Christians through the gospel, sacrament, and apostolic ministry—are saved by Christ the universal Savior, even if it is unknown to them. They are already “anonymous Christians” since all other religions are “anonymous Christianity” because of the grace of the inclusive presence of Christ that is universally operative in them.²⁰ Consequently, Rahner’s

²⁰ Rahner has wrestled with this theme in his numerous essays. For an illuminating but synthetic reformulation of it, see Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2007). There is, however, a subtle distinction between the “fulfillment” and the “inclusive presence of Christ” theories. In the case of the former, there can never be any salvation without the gospel. It stresses the partial,

position becomes susceptible to the charge of inclusivism.

However, along this line of profounder sensitivity as found in Postconciliar theology, the singular contribution of Pope John Paul II remains outstanding. More than any other pope before him, John Paul II—in what appears as an unprecedented endorsement as well as a real and important advance—emphatically “affirms the operative presence of the [Universal] Spirit of God in the religious life of non-Christians and the religious traditions to which they belong.”²¹ Following the path of the achievements and insights of his two predecessors (John XXIII mediately and Paul VI immediately), John Paul II, in his first encyclical, *Redemptoris Hominis*, set for his pontificate, *inter alia*, the goal of unity and dialogue among Christians and with non-Christians. With regard to the latter (non-Christians), the pope acknowledges in no uncertain terms the operative presence of the Spirit of truth in the “firm belief” of the other religions when he asks:

Does it not sometimes happen that the firm belief of the followers of the non—Christian religions—a belief that is also an effect of the Spirit of truth operating outside the visible confines of the Mystical Body—can make Christians ashamed at being often themselves so disposed to doubt concerning the truths revealed by God and proclaimed by the Church and so prone to relax moral principles and open the way to ethical permissive-

temporary, and so defective blind human yearning and search for God which only finds fulfillment in Christianity through Christ in whom God is revealed in person requiring the obedience of faith. Whereas the latter, on the contrary, views the human yearning for God as not merely natural and the result of human effort but already as a graced and supernatural existential condition. In other words, there can never be any human search for God that is not always already initiated by God and constitutes God’s self-communication or self-gift to all human persons regardless of whether they know it or not, and whether or not they respond to it or welcome it. It is already by and in giving himself that God initiates the process of his being sought by the human being. For more detail, see Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 52-55.

²¹ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 69.

ness?²²

This affirmation of the operative presence of the Spirit of truth in the “firm belief” of the other religions became recurrent in John Paul’s numerous speeches, writings, and even prayers. Appropriating the texts of John 3:8 which speaks about the Spirit who “blows where he wills;” and Romans 8:26 where Paul speaks about the Holy Spirit who prays in us, respectively, the Pope underlines that every authentic prayer both of Christians and non-Christians is inspired by the same Spirit of the same living God even when, for some, this God is the great Unknown. According to him, “We trust that wherever the human spirit opens itself in prayer [even] to this Unknown God, an echo will be heard of the same Spirit who, knowing the limits and weakness of the human person, himself prays in us and on our behalf, ‘expressing our plea in a way that could never be put into words’ (Rom 8:26).”²³ Again, in his address to the members of the Roman curia on December 22, 1986, in the wake of the October 17, 1986 World Day of Prayer for Peace held at Assisi, the pope alluded to the mystery of unity of all of humankind grounded in creation and redemption. Accordingly, that unity which cuts across differences and divisions was palpably manifested during the Day and in the atmosphere of authentic Prayer. For the pope then, every authentic prayer always takes place under the influence and within the horizon of the Spirit. He thus submits: “We can indeed maintain that every authentic prayer is called forth by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in the

²² John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis, The Redeemer of Man* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1979), § 6.

²³ John Paul II, *Message to the Inhabitants of Asia* (Manila, February 21, 1981), § 4, cited in Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 69.

heart of every person.”²⁴ But the pope did not simply stop at this. Perhaps working under the assumption that what appears to be new doctrinal statements or teachings do not necessarily revoke their antecedents, John Paul II’s deeper sensitivity to the presence and operation of the Universal Holy Spirit of God is still seen to be undergirded by the fulfillment matrix, nevertheless. Hence he maintains, “The intercession of the Spirit of God who prays in us and for us is the fruit of the mystery of the redemption of Christ, in which the all-embracing love of the Father has been shown to the world.”²⁵ There is, however, a certain pay off in all this. From the new growing positive attitude, a clearer teaching is beginning to emerge in which the church understands and recognizes, at least to a certain extent, that the Holy Spirit is not only universally present in the world and actively at work in every human being, and, therefore, in members of other religions, but also “in the other religious traditions themselves.”²⁶

This emerging understanding is given its clearest and most explicit articulation in the encyclical of John Paul II on the Holy Spirit, *Dominum et Vivificantem* (given May 18, 1986). Here, the pope most explicitly refers to the universal dispensation of the Holy Spirit which is not limited to the two thousand plus years since the birth of Christ. Rather, it embraces “the whole action of the Holy Spirit even before Christ—from the beginning, throughout the world...”²⁷ Accordingly, this prevenient action of the Holy Spirit “has

²⁴ See more detail in Pontifical Commission “Justitia et Pax,” *Assise: Journée mondiale de prière pour la paix* (October 27, 1986).

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 69.

²⁷ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Dominum et Vivificantem, On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1986), § 53.

been exercised, in every place and at every time, indeed in every individual.”²⁸ The wind which blows where it wills, “reminds us of the Holy Spirit’s activity also ‘outside the visible body of the church.’”²⁹ And once more, the leitmotif of the presence and activity of the Universal Spirit is referred to in the encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio* {henceforth RM (given December 7, 1990)}. Here again, with crystal clarity, the pope speaks of the special manifestation of the Spirit in the church and its members but whose presence and operation is not limited to the visible boundaries of the church. Rather, the Spirit’s “presence and activity are universal, limited neither by space nor time.... The Spirit... is at the very source of the human person’s existential and religious questioning which is occasioned not only by contingent situations but by the very structure of its being. The Spirit’s presence and activity affect not only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions.”³⁰ And even more explicitly, through the Universal Spirit, the pope says God “does not fail to make himself present in many ways, not only to individuals, but also to entire peoples through their spiritual riches, of which their religions are the main and essential expression.”³¹

It remains to be said that despite this emerging, and indeed what appears as a blossoming understanding concerning the affirmation of the universal presence and activity of the Holy Spirit not simply in the members of non-Christian religions but also in the religious traditions themselves, the guiding frame of thought remains the

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, *On the Missionary Mandate of the Church* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1990), § 28.

³¹ Ibid., § 55.

fulfillment model. In fact, this framework is even made most explicit in John Paul II's apostolic letter, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (henceforth TMA), in which he unmistakably states: "Christ is thus the fulfillment of the yearning of all the world's religions and, as such, he is their sole and definitive completion."³² This same framework is also the organizing principle in the document jointly issued by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, captioned "Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflections and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ" (May 19, 1991). More still, the paradigm is even acutely discernible in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's declaration, *Dominus Iesus* (2000), which among other things, maintains the unicity of Christ as the only universal Savior; that the Holy Spirit does not work salvifically in the other religions apart from Christ; and emphasizes all the more the gravely deficient situation of non-Christian religions objectively speaking.

After all is said and done, the question remains: "why the other religions in the first place?" The answer may not simply be a facile recourse to the Barthian musing that they are merely "beliefs" because of the incommensurable human search for God as opposed to "faith" which is the obedient response to God's free self-revelation in Christ. Is it possible to also recognize in the other religious traditions something of divine initiative toward human beings without necessarily subsuming it under the central affirmation of the Christian "way" as the only way of salvation and union with God? Can God not freely draw all kinds of different people to himself by all sorts of different routes

³² John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente, On Preparation for the Jubilee of the Year 2000* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), § 6.

apart from the Christian way? We may be overconfident that we already have the secured roadmap to the divine, but what if, and rightly so, the subalternized and the space of subalternity (the religions and religious others) also constitute a site of divine revelation? And if so, how do we measure how much of divine presence is there and from whose norm? Whose perspective? By the way, if the Spirit is at the very source of all human persons' existential and religious questioning (search), as John Paul II accedes in RM, how could it be said at the same time that such search and questioning is a blind human search for God (that is, merely human effort and initiative) as the pope seems to underline in TMA?³³ This is not only illogical and inconsistent, but a *contradictio in terminus*: something cannot be and not be at the same time. Again, if there are elements of truth and grace, as well as spiritual riches understood as fruits of the Universal Spirit through which God, in many ways, makes himself present in other religions, does not the verdict that they are gravely deficient amount to contempt for God who freely chooses to make himself present in those manifold ways? There is no gainsaying that there are not two economies, one of Christ, and another, of the Spirit, but one single economy of redemption. Yet in that one economy of redemption initiated by the Father, there is manifest and operative real difference and not only unity between the mission of Christ and the mission of the Spirit. An exploration of this pneumatological real difference perhaps may be useful to theologically account for God's activity in other religious traditions without necessarily subsuming it under the horizon of Christianity as the paradigms of both "anonymous Christianity" and "fulfillment" are wont to suggest. Perhaps it is pertinent to stress that the view represented by the above two theories savor

³³ See Ibid.

“too much of religiocultural imperialism in claiming for Christianity all that is good in other religions.”³⁴ In any case, a significant development that is right on the mark, at least, is the emergent recognition by the church of the universal presence and activity of the Spirit of God outside the boundaries of the church and not only in individuals but also in non-Christian religious traditions, in their firm beliefs, and cultures. Let me now, in the following section, talk a little bit more about the explicit *proprium* and mission of the Spirit as distinct from that of Christ.

5.3 The Pneumatological Difference in the Mission of the Spirit

There is no question that in the aftermath of such historical experiences with Montanism, Joachim of Fiore, and Reformation, the Catholic Church has always been apprehensive of any attempts to emphasize the distinctness between the missions of Christ and Spirit. As the church views such emphasis as a potential source of division and proliferation in the one body of Christ, consequently, the economic and ecclesial unity of the two missions rather than how they are distinct has been the rule in ecclesial statements more so than an exception. In any case, it remains important to stress that there are no two economies but a single economy of the salvific will of God. Yet within this one economy initiated by the Father, there operates two missions with real and internal difference between that of Christ and of the Spirit. Whereas there is inseparable communion and complementarity in the Trinity, there is also real distinction and otherness which is not a mere mental convention. Thus, the Father is neither the Son nor the Spirit; neither is the Spirit the Son. The mission of the Spirit with its temporal effect

³⁴ John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today* (Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans; Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1995), 208.

is different from the mission of the Son with its temporal effect,³⁵ albeit the Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son. To minimize the difference between these two missions is to do violence to the Trinitarian mystery as the customary insistence on economic unity and complementarity of missions not infrequently tend to be easily conflated and misunderstood as one divine mission with two aspects.³⁶

Not only is the Spirit a distinct person from the Son by virtue of origin but there is also a difference between the temporal effect of the mission of the Spirit from the temporal effect of the mission of the Son. The mission of the Son is in content and shape inextricably linked not only to his manner of origin (generation or being begotten of the Father) but also to the temporal effect as expressed in the assumed human nature (incarnation), and in the whole of Christ's life, words, deeds, ministry, passion, death, resurrection, and ascension into glory at the Father's right hand. As the definitive and explicit climax of revelation in "the salvific economy willed by the One and Triune God,"³⁷ the Son's mission and entry into human life and history in the particularity of Jesus of Nazareth is once-and-for-all, unrepeatable, and in that sense, permanent and finished. So understood, there can be neither new incarnation nor new paschal mystery. But not so with the mission of the Spirit. Whereas the mission of the Spirit in content and shape is strongly connected to procession from the Father through the Son, its temporal effect is other than incarnation (in the sense of assuming any created reality in the form of

³⁵ Thomas Hughson, "Interpreting Vatican II: "A New Pentecost," *Theological Studies* 69 (2008): 3-37 at 28-9.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷ Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *Declaration, Dominus Iesus* (June 2000), 11.

a hypostatic union) but expressed in “*self-giving presence and personal influence of the Spirit in creation and history* (emphasis mine).”³⁸ In this sense, the mission of the Spirit and its temporal effect remains unfinished, still occurring anew, and not confined or physically located in a definitive place since the Spirit keeps blowing wherever she wills. This “pneumatological difference underlies and makes possible continual newness precisely in and through the temporal effect in the mission of the Spirit—new gifts, inspiration of the Scriptures [or its new interpretations], surprising personal inspirations, unforeseen communal movements, organized local initiatives in service of neighbors.”³⁹ Thus, this temporal effect in the mission of the Spirit is so diffused that it is spread out and directed to all human persons and not merely to Christians alone (even though it is directed most fully to Christians in their communion with Christ and the Father), but to the whole creation since the Spirit is universally active at work. Not resting anywhere, not limited or restricted to any definitive place, yet the Spirit acts everywhere through all times in all nations, peoples, religions, and cultures. Until the eschaton, the temporal effect in the mission of the Spirit is still underway, unfinished, remaining always new and renewing.⁴⁰ As part of her role, the Spirit opens up the church to its eschatological future bringing about always, the possibility of newness, renewal, and reformation. It is because of the ever renewing work of the relational Spirit who leads the church to self-transcendence and self-criticism that the church can be said to be “*ecclesia semper reformanda*.” It can be argued, therefore, that Jesus and the Spirit do work in diverse and

³⁸ Hughson, “Interpreting Vatican II,” 30.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 31.

manifold ways within the framework of the unity of the single salvific economy initiated by the Father. The Spirit operates salvifically beyond the incarnate Christ before, during, and after the hypostatic union. The work of the Spirit in both Christianity and non-Christian religions may thus be different from, albeit not contradictory, to what Christ did or said. There is, therefore, a nonidentity in the missions of Christ and the Spirit, though they are complementary.

Besides, granted that the Word incarnate is the definitive and most explicit revelation of God, yet it is conceivable to hold that the divine Word (Logos) cannot be exhaustively identified with what has been revealed through the particularity of the historical humanity of Jesus from Nazareth. Through the hypostatic union, the humanity of Christ serves the divine Word as an instrument. It is possible then to conceive that the Universal Spirit who is not only the Spirit of Christ but also the Spirit of the Father may be actualizing different aspects of the one salvific economy initiated by the Father in non-Christian religions.⁴¹ Such salvific operation of the Spirit in other religions does not contradict what Christ had accomplished. Rather, Christ remains the once-and-for-all climax of revelation and the unique and universal Savior of humankind in accordance with the Christian faith claim, which, nonetheless, is a valid claim. But it must be pointed out that the Universal Spirit has been bestowing gifts, empowerment, and impulses, for example, on the likes of Moses, Joshua, David, the prophets; inspiration of Scripture, grace and truth in other religions, and so forth, before the incarnation and the paschal mystery of Christ. The Spirit did not start bestowing these gifts only after she was sent by

⁴¹ See Anselm K. Min, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World: A Postmodern Theology after Postmodernism* (New York and London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 131.

Christ post-Ascension to impart the fruits of Christ's paschal mystery. Indeed, it can be said that all God's salvific activity in the world which is climaxed in the paschal mystery of Christ is made possible only in the power of the Holy Spirit. A robust pneumatological horizon, therefore, invites respectful and discerning dialogue and solidarity of others as a better way for Christianity and the church to bear witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ and to the reign of God for the liberating redemption of the world. Let me now elaborate more on the unique mission of the Spirit.

5.3.1 The Spirit as Communion and as the Agent of Communion

As already established in previous chapters, the Spirit is not only the communion, the *vinculum amoris* in the Trinity but also binds the Triune God to creation and to the church, as well as the principle of communion and unity among the members (in spite of their differences) of Christ's Body. Also as seen above, the relational Spirit is the principle of "beyondness." As the creator and constructor of personality, the Spirit draws human persons beyond themselves in order to give of themselves to others. Jeffrey Vogel is right when he writes: "As the agent of communion, the Spirit's role is...to draw those whom he indwells out of their self-enclosure towards others and, ultimately, towards God. The Spirit is the source of outgoing motion in them, or the movement itself, directing them to God and neighbor."⁴² In the past, a lot of emphasis has been placed on the hiddenness, the holding back, and the self-effacement of the Spirit to the point of forgetfulness of the Spirit as the coequal third hypostasis of the Blessed Trinity. A construal of particularly the text in John's Gospel that the Spirit does not draw attention

⁴² Jeffrey A. Vogel, "How the Spirit Hides: Rival Conceptions in Recent Orthodox Theology," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 531 (2009): 99-122 at 99.

to herself (cf. Jn 16:12-14) has not too infrequently led to a diminution or limitation of the personhood and *proprium* of the Spirit. In the New Testament, a verb that is often used to speak about the movement of the Spirit is ἐκχέω which may mean “out-going,” “gushing forth” or “pouring out” onto others (cf. Acts 2:17, 33; 10:45; Tit 3:6). This verb depicts the very opposite of self-effacement or holding back. Rather, the Spirit pours herself out onto those she indwells, empowering and jolting them into motion oriented outward toward others. The gushing-forthness of the Spirit is always other-directed. Relationality and movement in an other-directedness is what is enabled by the outpouring of the Spirit. According to an interesting and illuminating insight of Kallistos Ware, the Spirit is “not so much hidden as transparent.”⁴³ No one can say Jesus is Lord except in the Spirit. In the illumination and transparency of the Spirit, Christians experience Christ as Lord and recognize others in their full humanity alongside their distinct treasures and epistemic potentials. In the transparent light of the Spirit, persons become sensitive and attentive to their vision or seeing of others in whom the Spirit brings God into presence. In the transparency of the Spirit human beings are oriented toward their fellow humans and become attentive to the neighbor in whom God is iconically revealed.

Attentiveness or sensitiveness to God which of necessity becomes sensitiveness and attentiveness to one’s fellows is what is enabled by the outpouring of the relational Spirit. Such sensitiveness engendered by the Spirit enables those she indwells to see God in others and others in God. It is the outpouring of the relational Spirit who anointed and rested on Christ that enabled him to give himself away completely and to dissipate

⁴³ Kallistos Ware, “The Holy Spirit in the Personal Life of the Christian,” in *Unity in the Spirit—Diversity in the Churches* (Geneva: Conference of European Churches, 1979), 139-69 at 165, cited in *Ibid.*, 105.

himself for others even to the point of death. This is what it means to “walk according to the Spirit” or to be “in the Spirit” rather than be “in the flesh” in accordance with the language of the Apostle Paul (cf. Rom 8:4).

Paul often correlates flesh and Spirit as two principles of activity and manifestations that interlap in the life of a believer. To walk according to the flesh (*kata sarka*) or to be in the flesh (*en sarki*) does not simply mean to live a corporeal or bodily existence (for even Christ himself did this and took care of people’s bodily needs). Rather, it means to focus or limit one’s gaze only on all that flesh means which is a domain that is resistant to or rejects God, and by the same token, hostile to all that God loves especially fellow human beings. Such fleshly gaze continually and voraciously annexes the other to itself by appropriating and objectifying the other. Flesh captures the very materiality and historicity of the human condition which inevitably entails vulnerability, sinfulness, fallenness, suffering, division, conflict, and mortality. Consequently, the flesh leads to death and its works are death-dealing. Among the works of the flesh are: idolatry (which is incidentally associated with death and the spilling of the blood of innocent victims unjustly), enmity, jealousy, dissension, selfishness, envy, and so on (cf. Rom 8: 6, 12-13; Gal 5:19-21). To the mammon and idol of neoliberal capitalism is sacrificed the blood of many human victims in the Two-Thirds World spilled through unjust and avaricious economic structures, and through other forms oppression and subjugation of the poor. By contrast, to walk according to the Spirit or to be in the Spirit is to be in filiation or to be united with the Lord. And this filiation, of necessity, finds expression in human solidarity and *koinonia*. Thus, the outpouring and indwelling of the Spirit leads to love of and friendship with God as well as with

neighbor. To walk according to the Spirit ultimately means life insofar as the Spirit is life and as the source of life, gives life (cf. Rom 8:9). As Gustavo Gutiérrez lucidly puts it: “To walk according to the Spirit is to reject death (selfishness, contempt for others, covetousness, idolatry) and choose life (love, peace, justice). To renounce the flesh and live according to the Spirit is to be at the service of God and others.”⁴⁴ It is to be in an abiding state of “vigilant insomnia,”⁴⁵ to use the language of Emmanuel Levinas, for the speech of the face of the neighbor. Therefore, it is in the power of the relational and transparent indwelling Spirit that we are able to go beyond ourselves and the proclivities of the flesh to not dominate and suppress the subalterns. The Spirit is thus truly the principle of communion and reconciliation.

Going by the Pauline construal of “the flesh,” we cannot but let our curiosity be aroused momentarily with regard to what it means to affirm: “the Word became flesh.” If flesh captures that which is fragile, fallen and prone to sin, subject to mortality, and resistant to God and to the reconciling activity of the Holy Spirit, how then can we continue to affirm that the Word, of all things, became flesh? It must be insisted that this affirmation is necessary if the redemptive work of Christ must preserve its significance. Such an affirmation points to the self-emptying of the Son of God in becoming flesh and thereby identifying completely with and sharing most deeply in the frailties and foibles of the human condition.⁴⁶ It is from within rather than from without that he redeemed that

⁴⁴ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *We Drink From Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People*, 20th Anniv.ed., trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books: 2003), 70.

⁴⁵ Sean Hand, ed., *The Levinas Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 28.

⁴⁶ Anselm K. Min, “The Church as the Flesh of Christ Crucified: Toward an Incarnational Theology of the Church in the Age of Globalization,” in *Religion, Economics, and Culture in Conflict and*

fallen condition. The church as the sacrament of Christ is reminded and challenged to be the “Flesh of Christ.” That is, the “Word became flesh” invites the church to empty itself and prophetically and intimately share in the human condition in the world in all its pain, misery, brokenness, sinfulness, conflicts, alienation, and in its subjection to mortality. This is even more urgent now because the Spirit has been poured out on all flesh, identifying with all humanity in all its differences, defects, poverty, and so forth, in order to recreate, liberate, renew, and reconcile it and all of creation with the Triune God. Though the Word became flesh without sinning, but the church as the “Flesh of Christ” is reminded of its non-hypostatic union with Christ and hence, of its susceptibility to lust, weakness, and sin;⁴⁷ and therefore, the need for its continual dependence on the renewing power of the Holy Spirit without basking in the euphoria of triumphalism and elitism. The church as the “Flesh of Christ Crucified” is a reminder that the church must not be aloof but be in sympathetic solidarity with, deeply involved and sharing intimately in the agonies of the weak and the beaten in their struggles for justice and liberation from sin and all its manifestations. This is the mission and witness to which the relational and resistant Spirit has empowered the church to embrace.

It is as the relational principle of communion that on the day of Pentecost, the Spirit mobilized the church for mission. Quite frequently, the Mystical Body theology tends to view the church as a fully-fledged structured reality, though having nascent operations, which Jesus simply turned over to the autonomous leadership of the apostles under the guidance of his memory. The account of Pentecost in Acts 2, however, presents

Conversation, The Annual Publication of the College Theology Society, vol. 56, ed. Laurie Cassidy and Maureen H. O’Connell (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2010), 97.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 98.

us with the opposite of such a stance. The church, according to Thomas Hughson, “became church only on Pentecost and in this became assistant to, instrument for, and acting in dependence on the Spirit.”⁴⁸ Although certain essential elements were potentially present, but before Pentecost the church as such did not yet exist. From Pentecost henceforward, however, the church existed and only acted under the power and as an instrument for the Spirit. Perhaps I must also not fail to stress that the church and, for that matter, Christianity, functions as an instrument for the Spirit only when it serves the Holy Spirit rather than silencing the Spirit. This is because it is a historical fact that the church, nay, Christianity has sometimes sided with power or through the coloniality of power imposed purportedly authentic interpretations on all with total disregard for local histories/epistemologies and situated lived experiences. It has also been lamentably complicit in intolerance, slavery, colonialism, inquisition, racism, sexism, and other sinful acts. On the African turf, the Rwandan genocide is a case in point. Christianity was also used to legitimate and defend the heinous, dehumanizing, and segregationist regime of apartheid in South Africa. On such sinful occasions, the Christian church (Catholic, Protestant, and so forth) cannot be said to be the instrument for the Spirit. When the church indulges in these kinds of iniquitous practices, then it defies the paradigm which the Holy Spirit reveals in Christ. Beginning with the Incarnation, Christ’s prophetic and liberative ministry, the Cross, the Eucharist, and so on, the paradigm is consistent: that divine power is expressed in solidarity of the oppressed and suppressed rather than for conquest and totalization. It is power for compassion, for love, for healing the wounded and broken, for releasing (in the sense of *aphesis*) the oppressed and lifting up the

⁴⁸ Hughson, “Interpreting Vatican II,” 32.

suppressed, for overcoming sin and its varied manifestations, for prophetically siding with and liberating the poor, and not for domination. Obedience to the Spirit in order to be instrument for the Spirit requires openness and vulnerability on the part of the church. This, among others, is what Christian witness to the divine, hidden in the vulnerable humanity of Christ, requires.

As already mentioned above, with regard to the institutional structures put in place by Christ, he did so in the Spirit in whose power he was conceived and who anointed him and empowered his ministry from the beginning to the end. Hence, Christ co-instituted those institutional structures with the Spirit. But then, it was only from Pentecost onward that:

the institutional structures Christ and the Spirit co-instituted existed and functioned in dependence on and in service of the Holy Spirit. That dependence resulted, of course, in a strengthened christological focus since now they (the disciples) adhered to Christ-as-sent-and-sending.⁴⁹

In one final crucial statement, Hughson submits:

Pentecost and the ensuing mission revealed the whole church in its social, communal reality, including the successors to the apostles and visible ministry, as deriving not only from the once-and-for-all life, ministry, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus but also in complete, constant dependence in unexpected ways on the mission of the Spirit who acts to provide ever new guidance in service of Christ's mission.⁵⁰

This means that the church as a community, in all its activities, both institutional and charismatic, is totally dependent on the Holy Spirit. What is required of a church that is totally dependent on the Spirit is to always, through careful discernment, recognize where

⁴⁹ Ibid., 33. It needs to be pointed out that the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council acknowledged the church as dependent on and as an instrument for the Holy Spirit: "As the assumed nature, inseparably united to him, serves the divine Word as a living organ of salvation, so, in a somewhat similar way, does the social structure of the church serve the Spirit of Christ..." (LG 8).

⁵⁰ Ibid., 33.

the Spirit is moving or working and join in rather than stifle the stirrings of the Spirit through the coloniality of power. Once more, this brings to the fore the significance of the epicletic nature of the church as one that confidently invokes the Spirit in order to be always faithful in all things.

Clearly, Acts 2 portrays a church that from Pentecost onwards, is dependent on the mobility of the Spirit for witness and mission. The Spirit opens the church up for mission through solidarity and dialogue. On the day of Pentecost, the outpouring of the Spirit, without destroying the gift of difference and pluriversality caused everyone to rather hear in his or her own native language. This common experience of everybody understanding the preaching of the apostles in his or her own native language fostered, more than anything else, solidarity among those gathered. Such solidarity made it possible for everyone assembled—strangers, natives, and others—to coexist and communicate within such a pluralistic and multicultural context as the Pentecost. Thus, we can see from Acts 2 that the Spirit engenders mission and witness in ways that are not destructive but respectful of genuine equality-in-difference and pluriversality which in turn enrich the Gospel of Christ quite in contrast with the monolingualism of the tower of Babel. This is more so because the Universal Spirit is also actively at work in those different and diverse cultural and linguistic contexts. As a matter of fact, mission and witness entail “finding out where the Holy Spirit is at work and joining in.”⁵¹ The relational Spirit continues to invite solidarity today as essential in the struggle for justice, liberation from dehumanizing oppressions, peaceful and hospitable coexistence, and for

⁵¹ See Kirsteen Kim, *Joining in With the Spirit: Connecting World Church and Local Mission* (London: SCM and Epworth, 2010).

witness and mission that is respectful of equality-in-difference in an increasingly pluralistic and multicultural but interdependent globalizing world. A fortiori, this need for solidarity calls for transformation of imagination in which the other has been constructed, objectified, and inferiorized. This call for transformation of imagination is a call to conversion, to *metanoia* by the relational Spirit who calls us to self-transcendence and drawing us beyond ourselves to solidarity of others. It is a call to break our connivances—whether by commission and especially by omission—with the social and religious structures that continue to dehumanize others and sustain unjust situations, and to become committed to a resistant and liberating common action that overcomes the oppressive status quo, while ensuring that all human persons actualize their destinies and all subalternized local histories with their epistemic potentials foregrounded and legitimized. Now that we have established the unique mission of the Spirit and her Universal Spirit presence and operation in other religious traditions including their firm belief and spiritual riches, I shall, at this point, elaborate more on the question of the relationship between the Universal Holy Spirit and “other spirits” with particular reference to West African spirit-universe and mystical experience.

5.4 The Universal Holy Spirit and the “other spirits” in West African Mystical Experience

The question of the relationship between God/Holy Spirit and the multiplicity of spirits in Etche and other West African *weltanschauungen* must be refocused. While the definitive revelation of God in Jesus must not be compromised, nevertheless, the God of the Bible whose name is translated by the vernacular names of God (with all their cultural baggage) in West African Christianity suggests that God can manifest himself through

several modalities in different religions. As a matter of fact, what must be kept in mind at all times in approaching people of other religions is the fact that God, through the Universal Spirit, has never left himself without being present in all nations at any time. As M. A. C. Warren notes: “Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion, is to take off our shoes, for the place we are standing is holy. Else we may find ourselves treading on men’s dreams. More serious still, we may forget that God was here before our arrival.”⁵² Warren further writes that “When we approach the man of another faith than our own it will be in the spirit of expectancy to find how God has been speaking to him and what new understandings of the grace and love of God we may discover in this encounter.”⁵³ Indeed, God, in ATR, is the relational dynamic center around whom all the other elements of African religions revolve.

Not surprisingly, Lamin Sanneh maintains that the adoption of African names for God in Christianity carries implications for social and cultural transformation since such names not only regulate indigenous naming rules, ethics, but also historical consciousness. Accordingly, “the name of God contained ideas of personhood, economic life, and social/cultural identity; the name of God represented the indigenous theological advantage vis-à-vis missionary initiative.”⁵⁴ Consequently, Sanneh argues that the fact that Christian expansion or its resurgence was limited to those societies that preserved the indigenous name for God “suggests that theologically God had preceded the missionary

⁵² See M. A. C. Warren, “General Introduction,” in John V. Taylor, *The Primal Vision* (London:SCM Press, 1963), 10.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, U. K.: Eerdmans, 2003), 31-2.

in Africa, a fact that Bible translation clinched with decisive authority.”⁵⁵ This means that the relational and flexible qualities of God in ATR makes him open to universality as attested to by the adoption of his vernacular names in translating the God of the Bible. This also means that the vernacular names used to designate the God of the Bible must not be uprooted from their cultural contexts with all their accompanying cultural baggage since this is what it means for God to be truly universal in a way relevant to every context. Therefore, the diverse vernacular names used to designate God in different religions as a supreme, creator, ultimate, and personal deity may not facilely be reduced to a common signification without considering their meanings and significance in their originating contexts.

To elucidate this point, Sanneh beams light on the signification of the term “*Olugbala*” which, for the Yoruba of Nigeria, means “savior.” It is this name *Olugbala*, together with all its natural signification in the Yoruba idiom, that is used to translate savior in the Bible thereby generating new understandings of Jesus Christ. In this endeavor of translating *Olugbala* into savior, the name could not have been completely excised from its connection with the rich heritage of *Ifa* divination from which it draws its import. Therefore, “The name for savior, *Olugbala*, for instance, is preloaded with older Yoruba theological notions of divine power, solicitude, and redemptive suffering. *Olugbala* accedes to the Jesus of Scripture without dumping the old cargo.”⁵⁶ This is the kind of reworking and rearticulation that is going on in African Christianity today. Accordingly, since God’s dynamic hierarchy in ATR is not incompatible with the

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 59.

existence of a multiplicity of spirits who participate in divine devolved power, they (the spirits) do not preclude but rather become instrumentalized in the realization of divine economy for the well-being of human beings and the achievement of their destiny in the world. Therefore, the multiplicity of spirits and divinities with regard to West African religions in relation to God-talk and the Holy Spirit speaks to the multiplicity of religions as the manifold ways and modalities through which the intended benevolent purpose of God's economy may be fulfilled and experienced. This is a way of affirming that insofar as other religions (non-Christian, including ATR) contain elements of truth and grace as already affirmed by the church, it is legitimate to say that they function as ways of salvation for their adherents since the Universal Spirit of the Mysterious God also operates salvifically in them. This means that ATR (with its values) and for that matter, other non-Christian religions, may not be seen merely as a kind of *praeparatio evangelica*⁵⁷ or merely as destined to find their fulfillment in Christianity. Rather, since the Universal Spirit has been and is salvifically operative in them, they enjoy some form of autonomy of their own and function as ways of salvation, at least, for their adherents.⁵⁸ In other words, "non-Christian religions may be seen as part of the plan of divine providence and endowed with a particular role in the history of salvation."⁵⁹ In this connection, the final statement of the Dar-es-Salaam conference of Third World

⁵⁷ Some African theologians like John S. Mbiti and Charles Nyamiti, among others, view ATR as *praeparatio evangelica*. This is also the position of John Paul II in his *Post-Synodal Exhortation, Ecclesia in Africa* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995), § 42, 67.

⁵⁸ Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity*, 65.

⁵⁹ Peter C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 65.

theologians submits: “We recognize also as part of the reality of the Third World the influence of religions and cultures and the need for Christianity to enter in humility into a dialogue with them. We believe that these religions and cultures have a place in God’s universal plan and the Holy Spirit is actively at work in them.”⁶⁰

Let there be no doubt that the said autonomy and role of non-Christian religions subtracts nothing from the Christian claim that Jesus is the unique and universal savior or that the Church is a sacrament of Christ’s salvation. Rather, granted that the Christian faith affirms Jesus as the mediator of “God’s gift of salvation to humanity in an overt, explicit, and fully visible way, which is now continued in Christianity,”⁶¹ it does not cancel or revoke God’s past covenants (Adamic, Noahic, Sinaitic, and so forth) and neither does it nullify the salvific operation (both past and present) of the Universal Spirit at work in other religions. But because Christ is the culminating point, the explicit and definitive revelation of God’s gift of salvation—which has been operative in other religions before this climax—he (Christ) and “the non-Christian religions are related to one another.”⁶² For the same reason, the non-Christian religions are also related to Christianity but cannot simply be reduced to or said to be fulfilled in Christianity, albeit, they can be open to Christianity. This faith stance calls for a dialogic encounter between non-Christian religions and Christianity in order for each to benefit from one another in constructing their identities and attaining their full potential. It is by respecting and recognizing the wholesome values of other religions that Christianity can modify them

⁶⁰ Sergio Torres and Virginia Fabella, eds., *The Emergent Gospel: Theology from the Underside of History* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1978), 270.

⁶¹ Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, 67.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 66.

and they in turn modify and enrich Christianity. It is not merely about inserting the Gospel into the non-Christian religious and cultural other; for such a strategy appears imperialistic and reconstitutes the coloniality of power.

Thus, in West African religious frameworks, religion is fundamentally about the divinization of human beings on earth through contact and closeness with the Transcendent and the realization of both individual and communal divine destinies. The fundamental issue and concern in West African cosmo-religious framework is less about preoccupation with exclusive belief-systems, creedal formulations, and bedrock of certitudes (however important they may be) than it is about the viewing of religion “as the matrix in which men and women experience and respond to the sacred in their human existence....”⁶³ It is, therefore, not so much about how much truth of the pre-Incarnate Logos (*asarkos*) is contained and operative in extra-biblical traditions, according to Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, and others, as about the truth of the religious and spiritual dimension of people’s situated lived experiences and their responses to the action of the divine within their traditions and human existence. Properly speaking, then, it is the Universal Spirit blowing where she wills who engenders such experiences and responses to divine action and grace.

In Etche and West African ancestral religions, the multiplicity of spirits corresponds to the maximization of the agentive competency of the divinities, spirits, ancestors, other human mediators. Such agency is enacted through their participation in God’s dynamic hierarchy and devolved power toward the realization of the goal of

⁶³ Kwame Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience* (New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 40-1.

religion in West African conceptual schemes. This goal is nothing more than the realization of humanity's divine destined course under the human condition in this life which ultimately culminates in the divinization of human beings for their wellbeing. It has been affirmed that West African primal religious world-views are acutely *this-worldly*. The idea of *this-worldliness* should not be understood as a relegation of transcendence or lack of eschatological orientation, or for that matter, purely in a materialistic sense. Rather, the notion of "*this-worldliness* encompasses God and man in an abiding relationship with God, in other words, the divine destiny of humankind, and the purpose and goal of the universe (emphasis original)."⁶⁴ In these world-views, heaven is already wedded to earth, the supernatural forms a continuum with the natural, and grace—God's presence mediated by the spirits, divinities, who are instrumentalized by the Holy Spirit—already provides the adherents with the salvific means they need to achieve the destiny intended for them by their divine author within the same historical process.

In these *Weltanschauungen*, the universe is understood as a holistic universe with no sharp separation, dualism, or conflict between the physical and the spiritual, the mundane and the sacred, the profane and the religious. We have amply illustrated this point previously in chapter 2 above.⁶⁵ Accordingly, the physical and the mundane act as a vehicle for, as a reflection, and indeed, as a sacrament of the divine. The unceasing commerce between the celestial and the terrestrial weld them into a complementary and unified organic system. In this conception, the divine or the transcendent, albeit distinct,

⁶⁴ Ibid., 92.

⁶⁵ See Chapter 2 of this work.

is neither separate from nor disengaged with the realm of human affairs, since humans themselves are constantly involved in the continual traffic and encounter with the divine especially through different ritual processes and in self-transcendence toward others (such as the *Oghaghaa*). Within this sacramental imagination, God is seen in all things, according to St. Ignatius of Loyola: that is to say, God is sacramentalized in “other people, communities, movements, events, places, objects, the environment, the world at large, the whole cosmos. The visible, the tangible, the finite, the historical—all these are actual or potential carriers of the divine presence.”⁶⁶ Moreover, I must also say that the fact that these world-views do not conceive of any sharp separation between the sacred and the mundane does not mean to say that the Etche/West African religions are sacralist. Being sacralist means to be “so preoccupied with the sacred as to prejudice the material well-being of the community and to impede man’s control over his environment.”⁶⁷ Rather, the sacred and the mundane are not seen as alternatives or irreconcilable polarities but as complementary dimensions of reality. Over and against the constant tendency in Western traditions (especially neo-Scholastic ontotheology) to transcendentalize the divine absolutely, sacramentality and sacramental operationism radically connect the mundane material aspect of a sacrament to the divine signified reality, and subversively resists any unwholesome theological construct that renders the divine as merely abstract. Consequently, the affirmation is right on target that “at the heart of the universe and of religion [of West African world-views] is a divine-human

⁶⁶ See Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism*, New ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 10.

⁶⁷ John S. Pobee, *Toward an African Theology* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon, 1979), 46.

relationship for the fulfillment of humanity's divine destiny.”⁶⁸

Put another way, this conception discloses the truism that God seen through the prism of West African ancestral religions is keenly involved in a dynamic and relational engagement with human beings in this world in a way that is intended for their good and wellbeing. Indeed, Dominique Zahan has also aptly drawn attention to the *this-worldliness* of African mysticism and spirituality when he wrote: “man [African] aspires to become God; certain rites even lead him there. However, he never leaves his human condition; he does not rise to the sky in order to peacefully bask in the beatific vision. Rather, he obliges God to come to earth, to renew his closeness to man, to descend to him in order to divinize him. Thus, the favored place for the African beatific vision remains the earth.”⁶⁹ Thus the world, the universe remains a sacramental site for divine-human encounter for the good and salvation of humanity and creation. The material world in this African perspective, therefore, “is not only not evil, but shares in the same destiny of goodness as the human race itself. The salvation of humanity also entails the re-creation of the material world—a new heaven and a new earth...”⁷⁰ which is the work of the life-giving and Creator Spirit. It is a frequent tendency in Christianity for Christians to be so preoccupied with the life of the world to come and beatific vision that they sometimes seem not to know how to live this life in this world by cultivating positive human solidarity, friendship, compassion, and concern for the alterity of others. It makes

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Dominique Zahan, *The Religion, Spirituality, and Thought of Traditional Africa*, trans. Kate E. Martin and Lawrence M. Martin (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 17.

⁷⁰ Aylward Shorter, *Jesus and the Witchdoctor: An Approach to Healing and Wholeness* (London: Geoffrey Chapman and Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985), 28.

absolutely no sense to fret so much about the life to come in the next world when a majority of the people (of the Two-Thirds World ravaged by poverty, for instance) have not even started living this present life with dignity. Consequently, in connection with human well-being and the realization of their divine destined life, the numerous spirits and ancestors as mediums and intermediaries, are instrumentalized to mediate the manifold aspects of the divine economy. According to Caleb Oladipo, they guarantee the solidarity, stability, and progress of the human community in the world insofar as this role will engender the achieving of the expected destined course of the life of the members of the community.⁷¹ In his attempt to construct a relevant African pneumatology, Oladipo limited himself to utilizing the functionality of the ancestors only in accounting for the operation of the Holy Spirit in Yoruba African indigenous Christianity.⁷² He purposefully or otherwise failed to integrate the place of the divinities (*Orisas*) in his analysis and articulation. The divinities are not merely deified beings but fundamentally spiritual or divine entities and may not be neglected in any talk about African pneumatology.

Furthermore, the spirits who mount certain human beings like the diviner-doctors, prophets, healers, *dibias*, and so on, empower them to dislodge evil forces, to bring therapeutic healing to the ill, and succor to victims of witchcraft. They mount people in order to dispose such persons to not just affirm themselves through realization of their own destined course in life but also to give themselves away for others. This is very

⁷¹ See Caleb Oluremi Oladipo, *The Development of the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Yoruba (African) Indigenous Christian Movement* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1996), 107.

⁷² See *Ibid.*, 136, 149.

redolent with the Spirit mounting/resting on/anointing Jesus for his ministry during which he would give himself completely away for others to the point of death. It is about relationality, hospitality, and friendship. It is these excellent relational qualities of the spirits as well as the plurality and flexibility assumed in God's dynamic sovereignty that have been reworked and appropriated into West African Christianity particularly in relation to the Holy Spirit. West African Christianity necessarily presupposes the assumptions of ATR and what Kwame Bediako calls "primal imagination."⁷³ The relational, pluralist, and dynamic assumptions inherent in ATR makes it open to the universality of the Gospel. This allows for the possibility of the modification of indigenous knowledges and traditions by the Gospel as well as the modification and expansion of dimensions of the Gospel by the indigenous traditions through translation, rereading of the Bible, and reinterpretation giving rise to new understandings of Jesus Christ in the light of situated lived experiences and local histories.

This explains why, in the process of the Gospel proclamation, there can never be—contrary to the colonial missionary ideological style of transplanting Western culture as the purported civilizing aspect of evangelization—any active senders and passive receivers. This has been the Catholic way from the very beginning even though this approach was abandoned at some point in its history when it became the dominant religion. It cannot be gainsaid that any one or group in the over one millennium history of the Christian church has completely abandoned their "cultural and religious heritage in order to become Christians."⁷⁴ There is not, and there has never existed anything such as

⁷³ Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa*, 87.

⁷⁴ Oladipo, *The Development of the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 36.

some pure form of universal acultural Christianity. The universality of the Gospel means that there is no such thing as a universal Christianity that is not at the same time a Christianity with a Jewish background, a Greco-Roman background, and rightly so, cannot equally be without an African background. Faith is always “the faith of a historical community. Christianity...was born in the matrix of Judaism and in Semitic context.”⁷⁵ It is only within the particularity of its cross-fertilization with diverse and different religious and cultural contexts that the Christian faith derives its universal appeal. While conversion to Christianity necessarily brings about radical change in the lives of converts, Christianity, however, cannot exist at the expense of the authentic values of indigenous religions. Whereas Christianity may transform or correct some aspects of those traditions when necessary, they also in turn actually enrich Christian faith as they become the modes through which it finds concrete expression and self-realization. Hence, on the need for Christianity to don an African face, for instance, James Johnson has this to say:

Christianity is a religion...suitable for every race on the face of the globe. Acceptance of it was never intended by its founder to denationalize any people, and it is indeed the glory that every race and people may profess and practice it and imprint upon it its own natural characteristics, giving it a peculiar type among themselves without losing any of its virtue. And why should there not be an African Christianity as there has been a European and Asiatic Christianity?⁷⁶

A people, therefore, need not and must not desert their cultural and religious heritage and traditional values in order to become or upon becoming Christian. Subaltern local histories and epistemic potentials must not be silenced by the coloniality of power.

⁷⁵ Pobee, *Toward an African Theology*, 29.

⁷⁶ Quoted by E. A. Ayandele in *CIA*, 613, cited in Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity*, 5.

There is no gainsaying that God's salvific love and faithfulness is for all humankind. In the light of this, Sanneh affirms that plurality "is a prerequisite for authentic Christian living, since translation assumes cross-cultural encounter where the notion of multiple living cultures makes it necessary to exchange one form of communication for another. In both its Protestant and Catholic forms, Christianity has affirmed with the Gentile breakthrough the shibboleth of God's faithfulness toward all peoples."⁷⁷ West African ancestral religion with its pluralist propensity has, no doubt, helped its traditions to be broadened and deepened by the impact of its contact with the two religions of Islam and Christianity, irrespective of their enormous negative dimensions with regard to the fragmentation of Africa. By the same token, African religious values have also modified and expanded the dimensions the gospel. The pluralist and flexible proclivity of ATR makes it possible for it to be open to cross-fertilization with other faiths. In point of fact, as Ghanaian evangelical theologian, Kwame Bediako rightly underscores: "Long before pluralism, religious as well as cultural, became a subject of serious discussion in the Western world, many Christian communities in Africa had been living, witnessing and learning to survive and grow in the context of religious pluralism."⁷⁸ Elsewhere, Bediako indicates that ATR, Christianity, and Islam, have often lived side by side and contributed to the various

⁷⁷ Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 233.

⁷⁸ Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa*, 68-9.

African societies.⁷⁹ Openness and welcome to other religions have thus been a hallmark of ATR. It is this dynamism, this flexibility, and this openness and ability for creative interdependency that has enabled the primal imagination of ATR to survive, albeit not unaffected, but not completely wiped out in its contacts with the other faiths. In African Christianity, there is, therefore, both continuity in relation to the authentic values of ancestral religions and discontinuity as well.

In the realm of continuity between Christianity and the West African ancestral religions, there is a question that needs to be answered. It is about the issue of how the ‘primal imagination’ brought its own peculiar gifts of relationality, plurality, multiplicity, dynamism, and so on, to bear on “the shaping of Christian affirmation [and tradition].”⁸⁰ In order to answer this question, we must turn to the insights of African Initiated Churches (AICs)—also called *Spiritual Churches* because of their emphasis on the Holy Spirit and her works—in order to see what they have done with the primal imagination and African religious heritage. More than the mainstream missionary churches, the AICs remain the best site so far for ascertaining how African indigenous values (particularly “spirit qualities”) have been reworked and appropriated into the Holy Spirit in Christianity. They also remain the best place to find Christianity “brewed in an African pot.”⁸¹ But before investigating this, let us first establish that such reformulation and

⁷⁹ Kwame Bediako, “Christian Witness in the Public Sphere: Some Lessons and Residual Challenges from the Recent Political History of Ghana,” in *The Changing Faces of Christianity: Africa, the West, and the World*, ed. Lamin Sanneh and Joel A. Carpenter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 117-33.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 89.

⁸¹ For this expression, I am beholden to Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator’s book entitled *Theology Brewed in an African Pot* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2008).

reworking taking place in African Christianity today is not unprecedented. It has been native to Christianity.

5.5 Biblical and Patristic Antecedents

Certain biblical data provide us with evidentiary materials for understanding the usage of the term “spirits” or group of spirits and their creative assimilation into the Holy Spirit. Already in the Old Testament, there is a precedent in the prophetic and priestly traditions which creatively reworked, reinterpreted, and assimilated Canaanite and other Semitic divinities into angelic host in the service of Yahweh in divine council. Equally, the names of Semitic divinities were assimilated into the name of Yahweh of Israel.⁸² Having said that, I shall focus here on the book of Revelation with its several references to a group of “seven spirits” and how this has been reworked by certain church Fathers and contemporary biblical commentators in relation to the Holy Spirit. The book of Revelation severally refers to a group of “seven spirits” (Rev 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6). Of crucial importance to note is the fact that the first mention of the “seven spirits” is set within the context of the initial greeting and doxology. Thus in Rev 1:4-5, “grace and peace” are presented by John as coming “*from* him (God) who is, who was and who is to come, and *from* the seven spirits of God which are before the throne, and *from* Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, the ruler of the kings of the earth” (emphasis mine). A close reading of the use of the preposition *καί* (from) in the above

⁸² For more on this, see especially, Martin Rose, “Names of God in the OT,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. Freedman David Noel (New York: Doubleday, 1997); see also Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 35-6; Loren Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology: A Study in Early Judaism and in the Christology of the Apocalypse of John* (WUNT 2/70; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 200-203.

passage seems to suggest that the “seven spirits” are included in the divine power to bestow grace and peace so much like God the Father and Jesus Christ. Since such a capacity to bless with grace and peace indicates something of a divine origin, it is possible to infer that the “seven spirits” participate in the same divinity as the Father and the Son. In other words, the seven spirits here appear to be on the same level as God the Father and Jesus the Son. Indeed, Paul makes this explicit when he writes, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all” (2 Cor 13:14). From this occurrence of the “seven spirits” in Rev 1:4 as sharing in the same divinity as the Father and the Son, it is not hard to see how the early church would rework and re-dimension it into what would generally designate “Holy Spirit.” This is further coupled with the fact that in accordance with biblical numerology, the number “seven” symbolizes fullness or completeness. Seen in this perspective then, the “seven spirits” would “represent the Spirit of God in its fullness and completeness.”⁸³ Considering the metaphorical and apocalyptic density of Revelation, Edmondo Lupieri is cautiously inclined to think that “John is developing some kind of (pre-) Trinitarian thinking.”⁸⁴

It is clear from the other passages in Revelation that the “seven spirits”—albeit, often expressing angelic traits—are not the same as the seven angels. For instance, the seven stars held by the Son of Man are said to represent the angels of the seven churches

⁸³ For an interesting discussion of this kind of construal as well as its juxtaposition with an alternative religio-historical perspective which views the seven spirits as simply seven archangels, see Eduard R. Schweizer, *Spirit of God* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1960), 105-6.

⁸⁴ Edmondo F. Lupieri, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, Italian Texts and Studies on Religion and Society (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 102.

and the seven lampstands are the seven churches (1:16, 20; 2:1). Certain passages, however, seem to give the impression of a subordination of the seven spirits. For example, Revelation mentions “he who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars” (3:1); “Seven flaming torches burn before the throne; these are the seven spirits of God” (4:5); “I saw him with seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out to all the earth” (5:6). From all this, there emerges not only an apparent subordination of the seven spirits but also a conflation of their personal and impersonal characters. How is it that the seven spirits participate in divinity as evidenced by their capacity to bless with “grace and peace,” and yet, are presented as flaming torches before the throne, held by Christ, the seven horns, and the seven eyes of the Lamb? To my mind, there does not seem to be any contradiction here. It is not unusual for impersonal metaphors to be employed to describe the divine in the Bible. As has already been pointed out in Chapter 3, the Bible is full of impersonal metaphors or images used to describe the Spirit and her activities, such as, wind, fire, light, oil, water, power, energy, and so on. The impersonal images thus describe the activities of a personal being who is a divine person. Both aspects of the Spirit’s character are complementary rather than contradictory. What sometimes may appear as a seeming subordination of the Spirit may rather well be an aspect of the self-effacement of the Spirit in bringing into presence the other Persons. It is in the Spirit that the other Persons are made present. For the Spirit is the communion of the Father and the Son as well as the principle of communion between the Trinity and humanity, and all of creation. In keeping with this line of understanding, then, the seven eyes projected as the seven spirits of God sent out to all the earth, for instance, would designate an all pervasive presence and immanence of God in the whole

world through the Universal Spirit. The Spirit is both “the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of Christ the Lamb”⁸⁵ not because she is lesser than them but rather because they are always manifested or revealed in the Spirit.

In a very illuminating article, Romanian biblical scholar, Bogdan Bucur explores the *Wirkungsgeschichte* (reception history) of the Book of Revelation. He unveils how both patristic and contemporary commentators have been wrestling with the construal of the passages under consideration. Bucur’s agenda, undoubtedly, is to overcome a certain exegetical impasse between the alternatives of either viewing the occurrence of “spirits” in the texts as actually referring to spirits or to angels. Utilizing available evidence constructively, Bucur sketches the contours of an angelomorphic pneumatology as a way to hybridize the two alternatives. Nevertheless, he points out, among others, how, in referring to the seven spirits, the seven eyes, and the seven lamps, which, of course, may be found in Zechariah 3:9 and 4:2,6-7,10, the Book of Revelation connects them with the rest/tabernacling of the seven spiritual gifts on the messianic stump of Jesse (Isa 11:2; cf. Prov 8:12-16).⁸⁶ Drawing on the fragments from patristic commentaries provided by Albin Škrinjar and others, Bucur highlights a particular patristic reworking and reformulating, especially, of Revelation 5:6. Here Bucur reaches back to Oecumenius and Andrew of Caesarea who seem to construe 5:6 as referring to the seven gifts of the

⁸⁵ Cf. Matt 10:20; Jn 16:13; Rom 8:9, 11, 14; Gal 4:6.

⁸⁶ Bogdan G. Bucur, “Hierarchy, Prophecy, and the Angelomorphic Spirit: A Contribution to the Study of the Book of Revelation’s *Wirkungsgeschichte*,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127, no. 1 (2008):173-94, at 177.

Spirit.⁸⁷ Bucur corroborates this standpoint by citing Karl Schlütz who “has shown that a connection between Isa 11:2 (the seven gifts of the Spirit) and Zech 4:10 (the seven lamps) was an established topos in patristic exegesis.”⁸⁸ Furthermore, Bucur grants that both “Ancient and modern exegetes agree that Rev 1:4 is intended as a reference to the seven spirits/eyes/lamps of the Lord in Zech 3:9; 4:10”⁸⁹ which is also connected to Isa 11:2. The question of identifying the Spirit as impersonal spiritual gifts shares resonances with the biblical tradition of identifying the Spirit with impersonal metaphors such as wind, energy, water, and so forth, as a way of describing the manifold activity of the dynamic Spirit of God who resists any arbitrary or rigid formalization and routinization. It is in keeping with such tradition, it seems, that Jesus could say, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him. By this [water] he meant the Spirit....” (Jn 7:37-39; cf 4:10).

In a very excellent and fascinating move, Irenaeus of Lyons, in his *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, conceptualizes, with a remarkable clarity, the seven spirits as the manifold ways the Spirit indwells us to equip us for numerous services and destinies. Thus he asserts:

Wherefore also the Spirit of God is manifold in (His) indwelling, and in seven forms of service is he reckoned by the prophet Isaiah, as resting on

⁸⁷ Albin Škrinjar, “Les sept esprits: Apoc. 1,4; 3,1; 4,5; 5,6,” *Bib* 16 (1935): 2-24; Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes and Indices*, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1909), 5-6; Joseph Michl, *Die Engelvorstellungen in der Apokalypse des hl. Johannes* (Munich: Max Hueber, 1937), 113-34, cited in Bucur, “Hierarchy, Prophecy, and the Angelomorphic Spirit,” 178n21.

⁸⁸ Karl Schlütz, (*Isaias 11:2 [Die sieben Gaben des Heiligen Geistes] in den ersten vier christlichen Jahrhunderten* [Munster: Aschendorff, 1932], 34), cited in *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Bucur, “Hierarchy, Prophecy, and the Angelomorphic Spirit,” 180.

the Son of God, that is the Word, in His coming as man. *The Spirit of God*, he says, *shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, (the Spirit of knowledge) and of godliness; the Spirit of the fear of God shall fill him* (emphasis original).⁹⁰

For Irenaeus, therefore, the “seven spirits” correspond to the names of the seven spirits (the gifts) that rested upon Christ as prophesied by the prophet Isaiah. This Irenaeian construal also clearly echoes the Pauline theology of *charismata* where he holds that there is a diversity of spiritual gifts for a diversity of ministrations/services (*diakonia*) but all are the workings of the same Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 12:1-11). The same Spirit is present and manifests herself in diverse and manifold ways in different individuals through the presence of diverse spiritual gifts. The different gifts (or spirits) bestowed on different individuals are to be actualized and to be used for service in the community of the faithful. Of interest to us is how Irenaeus understands the gifts of the Spirit as the manifold ways and operations (*energeia*) through which the outpouring of the Spirit is active in distinct persons for service. After all said and done, the indication of the capacity of the “seven spirits” to impart the blessing of “grace and peace” much in the same way as the Father and the Son, coupled with the Pauline greeting formula in 2 Cor 13:14, and together with the trinitarian baptismal formula in Matt 28:19, is highly suggestive “that a reference to the Holy Spirit would have been the likely intention of Rev 1:4.”⁹¹ Thus, the seven spirits or the seven gifts would designate the active manifold ways of the operations of what the early church would not too infrequently reformulate and understand as a generalized “Holy Spirit.” The seven spirits leitmotif was, therefore,

⁹⁰ Irenaeus, *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, 9.

⁹¹ Bucur, “Hierarchy, Prophecy, and the Angelomorphic Spirit,” 178n23.

reworked by early Christianity “in the service of pneumatology.”⁹² If what we have been trying to articulate in the light of biblical, patristic, and contemporary exegetical materials makes sense, then it is legitimate to say that a similar line of thinking is also possible and even fitting for understanding the relationship between the pervasive presence of the Universal Spirit of God in the whole world and “other spirits” in the spirit-worlds of non-Christian traditions and cultures. Following from this precedence and relevant analogue, we will be most helped to situate our understanding of developments within African Christian theology along the continuum of a historical movement that has always given birth to Christian theology. With this in mind, let me now look into AICs’ rearticulation and reworking of the Holy Spirit in the light of the multiplicity of spirits of ATR. I will then build on this insight and expand it in ways that allow for new understandings of the Spirit from an African Christian perspective.

5.6 Expanding AICs’ Insight: Toward an African Christian Relational Pneumatology

A number of factors undoubtedly led to the emergence of AICs. Among others, they include: European disdain for African culture and values as primitive, the inferiorization of African personality, colonial political and socio-economic oppression and exploitation, fragmentation of African sense of wholeness of life via banishment of numberless Africans from their communal roots and solidarities through the slave trade, as well as the disruption of the cosmic unity through forced land-grabbing thereby disinheriting Africans, and so on. At a time when African beliefs in the supernatural world and spirits were demonized and dismissed as superstition by post-Enlightenment

⁹² Ibid., 194.

Europeans and colonial missionary Christianity, AICs inevitably arose, *inter alia*, to rediscover the Bible and a Christianity that rather than alienate Africans, speak and deal more explicitly with real African concerns while utilizing the traditional African religious heritage. Because of the genius of the AICs to tap into the core of African cosmo-religious world-views in their rediscovery of the Bible and new reception of Christianity, they can be said to be behind not only the survival of, but also the boost to an African Christianity that is growing in leaps and bounds today. In Nigeria particularly, the popularity and achievements of AICs and later neo-Pentecostal churches, have had profound impacts on the majority of the mainline missionary churches that can never be underestimated.⁹³ Such Spiritual churches, for example, in Nigeria today include: “the Cherubim and Seraphim Church, the Christ Apostolic Church, the Church of the Lord *Aladuras*, the Zionist, the Celestial Church of Christ, and the Apostolic Faith, to mention a few.”⁹⁴ It is in these churches that we see an expression of Christianity that is in profound and explicit continuity with ATR. Accordingly, “These churches take cross-fertilization seriously.”⁹⁵ It must be pointed out that these churches did not simply integrate or add ancestral religious heritage and practices to Christianity. Rather they

⁹³ See Donatus Udoette, “New Religious Movements in Nigeria: Challenges to the Church in the New Millennium,” *The Search* 1, no. 1 (2002):35-48; see also, Cosmas O. Ebebe, *The Impact of Pentecostalism on the Catholic Church* (Port Harcourt, Nigeria: Letatalk, 2004); Hilary C. Achunike, *The Influence of Pentecostalism on Catholic Priests and Seminarians in Nigeria* (Onitsha, Nigeria: African First Publishers, 2004); Engelbert Beyer, *New Religious Movements in Africa* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Sefer, 1997); Kofi Appiah-Kubi, “Indigenous African Christian Churches: Signs of Authenticity,” in *African Theology en Route*, ed. Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1979), 117-125; Nathaniel I. Ndiokwere, *Prophecy and Revolution: The Role of Prophets in the Independent African Churches and in Biblical Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1981).

⁹⁴ Oladipo, *The Development of the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 49.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

have been able to repackage and transform what have been previously believed in ATR alongside its concomitant attitudes, actions, and practices and given them Christian expression. Of particular interest is their understanding of ATR as oriented toward integral human health and wholeness as well as the dominance of spirit-dimension that sustains an orbit where spirits and humans are constantly intermingling. It is in this sense that we can understand how these churches have reworked the belief in multiplicity of spirits in the traditional ancestral religious space into the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

In a most remarkable way, the AICs have creatively appropriated the assumptions and genius of African ancestral mysticism and spirituality in what has emerged as a radical African reinterpretation and rearticulation of Christianity (closer to Jesus and the Apostles than to its Western expression). As Mercy Amba Oduyoye suggests, “salvation/liberation in Africa is primarily...for health and wholeness.”⁹⁶ Health here should not be understood as limited to healing from biological or physical illness. In this African conception, it means more than that. Health in this framework entails a more encompassing and comprehensive state of well-being of not just the individual but also of the society, and, of course, of the cosmic order as a whole. Health and wholeness in the African purview are more integral or multidimensional. They embrace different levels of well-being: the physical, mental, psychic, emotional, socio-economic, political, moral, spiritual, ecological, and so forth. Importantly, health and wholeness include being reconciled and in harmony with oneself, being at rights with each other, at rights with the world (material environment), and, of course, through sacramental operation, at rights

⁹⁶ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1986), 44.

with the spirits, and ultimately with God. It is about wholeness and restoring the balance of nature in an organic universe of which the human person constitutes an integral part if not the center but of which s/he is not the only inhabitant. Maintaining or restoring health and wholeness is one of the reasons for spirit-possession as illustrated in Chapter 2, geared toward the constant great struggle against violence and all anti-life forces.⁹⁷ That the material universe, objects, events, persons, and so on, can be and are carriers of divine presence does not say all about ATR's sacramental approach to life. There is more to this sacramental operation than a flat-out reflection of divine presence. As pointed out above, the spirits, divinities, and ancestors are understood to guarantee the solidarity, stability, and progress of the human community in this world. By virtue of their participation in the dynamic relational hierarchy and devolved power of God, they play a key role in the realization of divine economy insofar as this results in the actualization of human destiny. An actualized destiny enables a person to give away him/herself for others. To the extent that the spirits and divinities keep guaranteeing the realization of human destinies, they always engender new possibilities which make the sacramental presence of the divine remain always in a continual process of realization. In this sense, it can be said that ATR's sacramental approach to life is eschatological. But all this is the work of the spirits and the divinities.

Understandably, AICs have appropriated these qualities of the spirits, divinities, and ancestors in ATR. In a very strategic and creative theological move, AICs, according to James Fernandez, have refocused these experienced qualities of the multiplicity of

⁹⁷ See Eric de Rosny, *Healers in the Night*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985).

ATR spirits and divinities (in West African religious universe) by subjecting them to a “higher order of integration in a *Generalized Holy Spirit* (emphasis original).”⁹⁸ They have, therefore, successfully reconstituted and synthesized the multiplicity of the benevolent spirits of ATR into the One Holy Spirit. Consequently, all the benevolent influences, the empowering, healing, and liberative life-giving qualities as well as other workings of the spirits in ATR have been creatively engaged, reformulated, repackaged, transformed, and reinterpreted as the gifts of the Holy Spirit for a variety of ministries in AICs. These gifts are deployed for service to the community in taking care of human needs and resolving existential life-problems. Fernandez is, however, not unaware of the problem that may be posed by the spirits manifesting at times their parallel or even the uncertainty as to the subordination of these spirits causing a situation of spiritual schizophrenia.⁹⁹ What has been accomplished here is about a local reception and appropriation of the Christian message in a way that expands its dimensions and allows for new understandings.

African spirituality as we have seen above is anthropocentric (a human-centered spirituality, human wholeness and health). An authentic African doctrine of the Holy Spirit assures the legitimate aspiration of the multiplicity of spirits which is the eminent fulfillment of the destiny of human beings in the world. Hence, the aspiration of the

⁹⁸ See James W. Fernandez, “The Cultural Status of a West African Cult Group on the Creation of Culture,” in *African Religious Groups and Beliefs – Papers in Honor of William R. Bascom*, ed. Simon Ottenberg (Meerut, India: Archana Publications, 1982), 242-260, at 249, cited in Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, “The Word Became Flesh: Areas and Methods of Inculturation in the 21st Century,” in *The Church in Nigeria: Family of God on Mission, Acta of the First National Pastoral Congress* (Lagos: Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, 2003), 88-134, at 124.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

multiplicity of spirits becomes efficacious through the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ. West African Christian spirituality is viewed precisely as *this-wordly*. In this sense, the Holy Spirit understood as another *Paraclete* is meaningful and relevant to West African Christians because it emphasizes the third person of the Trinity as the one who continues the earthly work of Christ in healing, protecting from evil spirits and witches, giving abundant life, etc. Thus, an authentic African pneumatology is *this-worldly*, incarnational,¹⁰⁰ or kenotic. Just as the multiplicity of spirits in ATR are assigned by God to fulfill different aspects of God's purpose for human well-being, so in West African Christianity is "the Holy Spirit believed to be sent from God into the world to accomplish the purpose of God"¹⁰¹ for human beings. This kenotic understanding finds expression in spirit possessions, visions, dreams, ecstatic and prophetic utterances believed to be the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Through such possessions and utterances, those mounted by the Spirit suppress their rational faculties in order to allow the Spirit use them for the good of the community. The Holy Spirit comes down from the supernatural order and is palpably present in a mighty and mysterious manner in the community in the midst of singing, clapping, and dancing. In this way, the Holy Spirit in West African Christianity does not merely indwell persons for contemplating transcendence but is actually involved in a more holistic way in the quotidian life of not just individuals but the community as a corporate reality. Like the functionality of the deities and ancestral spirits, the Holy Spirit is now viewed as the giver of life, and imparts wisdom and knowledge. Hence, the Spirit is regarded as a person and not merely as the energy/power

¹⁰⁰ Oladipo, *The Development of the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 112.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

or the essence of God. And just as the multiplicity of spirits enjoy independence within the matrix of relational and dynamic transcendence, the Holy Spirit, it is believed, also enjoys independence in bestowing a variety of gifts to different persons and to distinct communities for a nonthreatening pattern of ministry. The multiplicity of spirits now find fulfillment in West African Christianity in the many ways in which the gifts of the Spirit are manifest for the building up of the community.¹⁰² This successful reappropriation of ATR's spirit-qualities into the overall project of reinterpreting and rearticulating the gifts and role of the Holy Spirit in Christianity is, to all intents and purposes, nothing short of an authentic African Christian pneumatology. And as far as this is concerned, AICs have played a leading role. This project of rereading, reinterpreting, and rearticulating which allows for new understandings of the Holy Spirit, means for Sanneh, the same process "whereby the Christian message is appropriated into existing local frameworks but still remains recognizably Christian, much like what the Greeks in places like Alexandria, Antioch, Athens, and Ephesus did with the Jewish heritage of Jesus."¹⁰³

Perhaps it may be important to caution that this reinterpretation or repackaging by AICs should not be trivialized as syncretism. As Sanneh eloquently explains, the term "Syncretism represents the unresolved, unassimilated, and tension-filled mixing of Christian ideas with local custom and ritual, and that scarcely results in the kind of fulfilling change signaled by conversion and church membership."¹⁰⁴ In keeping with this

¹⁰² Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 143-4.

¹⁰³ Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity?* 44.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

understanding, an example of syncretism may be, offering sacrifice to the God of Jesus Christ after converting to Christianity and at the same time also offering sacrifice to *Orisa*. On a further interesting note, however, Sanneh unpacks the undergirding motivation behind the facile use and indiscriminate application of the term syncretism: “Besides, syncretism is the term we use for the religion of those we don’t like. No one calls himself or herself a syncretist! It’s a name we use of others, and not in a complimentary way. Unless we use the term as a judgment against our own forms of religious practice, I suggest we drop it altogether.”¹⁰⁵ What the AICs have done is rather a rearticulation or cross-fertilization resulting from a new reception of the Bible and Christianity in a manner that deals more profoundly and explicitly with African concerns and reality. But this should not also come as a surprise to anyone. It may only be a surprise to someone who thinks that there can only be one expression of the so-called universal Christianity which is uniform in every respect and in every place. That could have been possible during the era of Christendom. Today, Christianity is no more Christendom but World Christianity which speaks the language of people and people understand it in their own native language and idioms just as it was on Pentecost when the church was born.

Additionally, this creative interpretation in AICs is by no means unprecedented. A relevant analogue exists, as indicated above, in the historical continuum of the development of Christian thought. As I have mentioned previously, evidentiary data indicate how old Testament priests and prophets did a similar reworking and assimilation of the Semitic spirits and *El* into the retinue of Yahweh’s divine council and into God’s

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

own name (for example, Elohim) respectively.¹⁰⁶ Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, and other Fathers of the Early Church did a similar reworking and reinterpreting of the biblical pre-Incarnate Logos within the framework of extra-biblical traditions; and more precisely within contexts of paganism and Hellenistic culture.¹⁰⁷ These Fathers renounced the tendency to view Christianity and non-Christian traditions as mutually exclusive.¹⁰⁸ Besides, we have also seen above how the “seven spirits” of the Book of Revelation and the “seven gifts” of Isaiah were theologically reworked by the Early Church and the Fathers into what came to be generally designated “Holy Spirit.” Indeed, even from a Catholic perspective, the self understanding of the church has never been constructed in a vacuum without taking into cognizance and critically reflecting on the multiple religious, socio-political, and cultural contexts that it inhabits in different epochs.¹⁰⁹ This was the case until the church lost sight of the theology of the local which was only rediscovered in Vatican II. The converts to African Christianity especially among AICs are able to creatively navigate their multiple religious heritage in a way that makes their Christian

¹⁰⁶ See the entry of Martin Rose, “Names of God in the OT,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*.

¹⁰⁷ See Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Oxford, UK.: Regnum Books, 1992), esp. chaps. 4 and 5.

¹⁰⁸ For an elaborate and illuminating study of this issue, see Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture Upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Oxford, U.K.: Regnum Books International, 1999), esp. part 1, chaps. 1-5.

¹⁰⁹ This self-understanding with regard to Christianity is reflected in the fact that as it expanded beyond its Jewish and Greco-Roman borders, the peoples of the other lands were not passive recipients in their encounter with the faith. Walls is right when he submits, among other things, that: “the meeting with...Africa...Asia has been equally transformative of the Christian faith, marking a new and decisive period in its history. [Furthermore]...such periodic transformations are entirely characteristic of Christian history and belong to the nature of faith, being rooted ultimately in the central Christian affirmation that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” See Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books and Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2005), 28-9.

faith authentically Christian and truly African. In place of the spirits and divinities, it is now the Holy Spirit who possesses persons in AICs. The visionaries, prophets, and the Lord Aladuras or healers are mounted by the Holy Spirit and empowered to bring healing, liberation from evil forces, and to restore to wholeness. What is interesting here is that the modality of spirit-possession is patterned on the assumptions of primal imagination of ATR except that now it is the Holy Spirit who descends through invocations, songs, drumming, and dancing, on the mediums. And in all this, the undergirding core principle remains relationality. In this authentic African Christianity, God remains the Unoriginate Origin and source of all cosmic powers for health and wholeness. This power of God for health and wholeness is effectuated and mediated through the life-giving work of the liberative and resistant Creator Spirit. The life-giving, liberative, and resistant Spirit actualizes Christ's solidarity with the poor, the weak and the powerless, the excluded, the oppressed, and the exploited of the world today. It is for this life which the Spirit brings, this health and wholeness, this truth and grace which God has bestowed on all peoples, that the church has been empowered by the Spirit for a life-giving rather than alienating and life-diminishing mission and witness. The church needs to work in solidarity with the religious others in a common action of liberating the world. It is difficult to disagree with Anselm Min when he writes: "The church does not exist for its own sake; it exists for the other, for the liberating redemption of the world in solidarity."¹¹⁰ As has been acknowledged, the Universal life-giving Spirit has been operative not only in different peoples but also in different religious traditions and in their

¹¹⁰ Anselm K. Min, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World: A Postmodern Theology after Postmodernism* (New York and London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 95.

affirmed beliefs. Part of the mission of the church thus becomes to approach these traditions in the spirit of expectancy with the hope of finding new understandings of God's love and grace in an atmosphere of friendship, solidarity, and hospitable encounter with the other since the truth of God always transcends any given conceptuality. This should be the proper attitude rather than one of assumed self-sufficiency and superior vantage point which preclude any possibility of openness, honesty, and humility (devoid of hubris) in the encounter with the religious others. It is grossly illusional and perhaps imperialistic to work under the assumption that whatever so-called gravely deficient elements of truth and grace present in these other religions are already superabundantly and uniquely present in Christianity and more precisely in the church (Catholic).

Fruitful and genuine interreligious dialogue, as Jürgen Moltmann insists, invites not only a clear understanding and defending of one's own faith conviction and perspective but also an awareness of incompleteness that is the condition of possibility for religious cross-fertilization.¹¹¹ The understanding that the Universal Holy Spirit is present and operative in other religions allows us to rethink and reconceptualize the claim of Christian uniqueness.

5.6.1 Rethinking the Claim of Christian Uniqueness

Perhaps at this juncture, it might be helpful to take a look at an illuminating proposal by Peter Phan in his book, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, concerning contemporary understandings of religious claims to uniqueness/universality in relation to the encounter with religious others as well as the issue of multiple religious belonging.

¹¹¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (San Francisco, California: Harper & Row Publishers, 1977), 163.

As a way to get around the exclusivist, inclusivist, and pluralist impasse in interreligious dialogue, Phan proposes four basic points. The first is that if the claim to uniqueness and universality constitutes “a fundamental article of faith of one’s religious tradition [it] must be maintained in interreligious dialogue.”¹¹² In this way, the pluralist thesis which holds otherwise is rejected. This pluralist thesis which Phan rejects, states (for Christians, for example) that Jesus is merely one of the many savior figures in the history of the world. Contrary to this, Phan’s proposal emphasizes the importance of authenticity in owning up and holding on to one’s own deepest faith convictions, since one cannot bracket one’s own perspective and still be able to fully appreciate that of another’s. The second point which provides the core of the third, is that “A distinction must be made between the claim of uniqueness and universality of one’s religious founder and that of uniqueness and universality of one’s religion as a social organization.”¹¹³ Phan is of the view that whereas the former which is an affirmation of faith “must be clearly maintained and defended” the latter precisely as an empirical statement prone to differing epistemologies and criteria of verification should be abandoned or significantly qualified. Phan substantiates this stance by utilizing the Thomistic distinction between knowledge based clearly on conclusions drawn from self-evident and verifiable principles, and faith which lacks the perfection of clear sight because only grounded in the will moved by divine grace. Finally, Phan stresses that maintaining and defending the faith claim of uniqueness and universality of one’s religious founder need not lead to exclusivism (nor, for that matter, to inclusivism) rather than an inclusive theology of religions. The fact that

¹¹² Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, 101.

¹¹³ Ibid.

the uniqueness and universality of particular faith claims lack empirical verifiability does not imply that faith statements lack veracity or meaning. Rather, their truth is assured only in terms of the assent of the will and not necessarily because they are so self-evident as to be exhaustively captured and conceptualized in exclusive secure institutional proclamations. In point of fact, because of the nature of Christian faith affirmations as not so self-evident, they are sometimes misconstrued even by Christians and oftentimes do not necessarily amount to convincing proofs for non-Christians.¹¹⁴

All in all, Phan suggests and rightly so, that our religious faith can have identity only in relationship with other faiths' perspective. With the distinction between the uniqueness and universality of the founder of one's religious faith and the religion itself, between Christ and Christianity (which must not be reduced to each other) clarified, Phan writes:

There is then a *reciprocal* relationship between Christianity and the other religions. Not only are the other non-Christian religions complemented by Christianity, but Christianity is complemented by the other religions. In other words, the process of complementation, enrichment, and even correction is *two-way* or reciprocal. This reciprocity in no way endangers the faith confession that the church has received from Christ the fullness of revelation, since it is one thing to receive a perfect and unsurpassable gift and quite another to *understand* it fully and to *live* it completely. It is therefore, only in dialogue with other religions that Christianity can come to a fuller realization of its own identity and mission and a better understanding of the unique revelation that it has received from Christ, and vice versa...(emphasis original).¹¹⁵

This very interesting position of Phan is quite in keeping with the understanding of the thesis of relationality we have been exploring herein; that identity can only be found and

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 96; see also Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa*, 38, esp. chap. 3: "How is Jesus Christ Lord? Evangelical Christian Apologetics Amid African Religious Pluralism."

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 66.

constructed in difference, in the encounter and relationship with an other. As Christianity comes to a fuller realization of its identity through encounter with other religions, by the same token, “other religions can achieve their full potential only in dialogue with one another and with Christianity.”¹¹⁶

Acknowledging that faith is fundamentally grounded in the assent of the will (which means that that which reveals or addresses itself to humans may be received/recognized or could be rejected through the exercise of the faculty of the will)—and not merely in the hard and fast institutional assertions/claims to secure certitudes and absolutes—entails that faith possesses an inherent openness that permits or allows for dialogue (interfaith). This is because as lacking the perfection of clear sight and verifiable self-evident principles, faith possesses an element of uncertainty (not untruth) and indeterminacy, and consequently, must continually struggle to take a leap to search for a clearer picture of the truth that confronts it. Because faith is grounded in the assent of the will, it can never be premised on imposition but rather on persuasion. No one can be forced to have faith or be saved against his or her will; for to do so is to deny and contradict human freedom which even God does not do. Perhaps this explains why it can be said that religion in a certain sense is the highest guarantor of liberty. This resonates with an Etche adage which says: “*arushi kpagbha ngangha, egoshi ya oshishi ejiri tuo ya*” which literally means “when a deity becomes arrogant by neglecting its part toward human well-being, then it would be shown the wood used to iconize it.” This means that for the Etche, not even a deity can compel their allegiance against their will if they decide not to honor it. This stance throws enormous weight around human liberty. If

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

faith is the assurance of things hoped for ([Heb 11:1]; that is, not yet fully possessed though anticipated), then it must continually adopt the attitude of incompleteness¹¹⁷ and, therefore, of constant expectancy¹¹⁸ for the surprising arrival of the unexpected God who comes only as a trace. For faith to be faith and not reduced to mere rational knowledge, then it invites maintaining an indefinite measure of groping/hope for the unexpected God in an open-ended fashion. This open-ended nature of faith allows for a questing that presses onward in hope of a fuller attainment of the plenitude of truth that has always already grasped the believer but which can only be filled out not merely by self-referentially looking inwards but more precisely by dialogic engagement with the inward meanings of the experiences of other faith perspectives. The questing of faith is in view of understanding. But since some understanding of God's self-communication to humans does not render the Mystery which is God less mysterious, then this questing of faith progresses somewhat asymptotically toward the God who addresses. David Burrell is right when he writes: "God's word presents a challenge to understanding rather than a certitude made easily available."¹¹⁹ Christian faith affirmations are, therefore, not merely a matter of hard and fast assertions but rather invitations to experience, to recognize, and to participate in the truth that is a person (Christ himself who is the way, the truth, and the life) who confronts humanity and calls for such recognition and assent. Crucially, for Christians, it is essential to be reminded that Christ is not only the truth but also the way.

¹¹⁷ Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 163.

¹¹⁸ See Taylor, *The Primal Vision*, 10.

¹¹⁹ David B. Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 61.

To follow him as the way is to follow a person, to experience, to participate in, and to respond to the truth of a person. But the uniqueness and identity of such recognition and assent can only be sharpened and clarified in the light of dialogic engagement with the religious other. This does not mean that Christian faith affirmations are to be derived from or determined by the content of other religious traditions. Rather, it means that Christian faith affirmation can only find its identity and the meaning of its own uniqueness in relationship to the claims and presuppositions of other faith perspectives. As Burrell lucidly puts it: “Our location in a world where diverse traditions become aware of their mutual presence to one another invites us precisely ‘on a voyage of discovery stripped of colonizing pretensions: an invitation to explore the *other* on the way to discovering ourselves.’”¹²⁰ Out of this encounter emerge greater clarity and a consequent readiness to make adjustments needed in order to adhere to the truth of God’s universal salvific will. One is, however, under no illusion that this clarity may, at times, not occur. Yet, we can still live together as friends in spite of disagreements and seemingly contradictory viewpoints.

Such an encounter enables faith to continually undertake autocriticism and be open to new translations and reinterpretations. This is important because the incomprehensible God through the Spirit of *novum* and possibilities never ceases to come or work in strange new ways and can be found in unexpected places beyond all human calculations, circumscription in dogmatism, and programming. In point of fact,

¹²⁰ Ibid; see Roger Arnaldez, *Three Messengers for One God* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), vii, cited in Ibid.

Jesus Christ is divine Word translated into humanity via the Incarnation.¹²¹ In order to engage humanity definitively, divine self-disclosure climaxed not in hard and fast theological formulae and propositions, but rather in a human being, in the person of the Word incarnate. Jesus is the dialogue of God with humanity. The climatic divine – human dialogue required that Divinity be translated into humanity, that God become human. In a similar vein, faith affirmations in dialogue with the others require that they be constantly translated in order to bear authentic witness to Christ and to provide the opportunity for others to recognize the significance of Christ for Christian believers. Through such witness to Christ and as the condition for others to perceive his significance for Christians, the Spirit might dispose the others to also recognize Christ and ultimately confess him as Lord. By the same token, it will equally allow Christians to respect, recognize, and proclaim other religions as revealing the truth of God. Such encounter must inevitably allow for mutual conversion.

Perhaps I need to also stress that the dynamism of the Spirit which is often experienced in the emergence of the uncontrollable, the unpredictable, the new, and the unexpected, does not mean that the Spirit is anti-institution, anti-structure, or anti-dogma. Rather, it is a way of underscoring that the Spirit cannot be routinized or domesticated because she blows where she wills. However, it is equally true that when the Spirit brings about newness, she guarantees its enduring and abiding impact by fructifying it and ensuring its stability and dependability in a way that is continually and dynamically transformative of human existence. Hence, newness and uncontrollability do not imply

¹²¹ See Andrew F. Walls, “The translation principle in Christian History,” in *Bible Translation and the Spread of the Church—the Last 200 Years*, ed. Philip C. Stine (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990), 24-39.

disorder, chaos, or unrelated pure succession since the Spirit is equally the Spirit of order who transforms chaos into promise and into being. As pointed out above, even the institutional structures of the church—which are vital elements for the fulfilling of the church’s mission—are coconstituted by Christ and the Spirit. But neither these ecclesial structures nor the church itself are objects of faith precisely because they are created realities. They have meaning only in relation to and in dependence on the Holy Spirit. It is for this reason that structures, institutions, order, traditions, dogmatic proclamations, and so on, can only be life-giving and not become sterile, anachronistic, oppressive, alienating, or exclusionary, if and only if they are continually dependent on the Spirit. For it is the Spirit who makes them come alive and become living traditions and institutions by being responsive to the signs of the times and attentive to the new ways and places where the Spirit is at work. Sensitiveness to and dependence on the Spirit who blows where, when, and how she wills invite traditions to constant self-criticism, translation, revision, reinterpretation, and creativity. For this is what makes a tradition a living tradition (a dynamic *traditio* and not a static *tradita*) because, in this way, it is able to proffer relevant answers to questions arising from new contexts and new situations or otherwise risk paling into insignificance and irrelevancy. Attentiveness to the workings of the Spirit warrant that traditions be changed or be adapted to fit new situations and current needs. This does not also mean that traditions or beliefs only matter in the face of novel circumstances.¹²² In fact, they impact on our everyday life and quotidian experiences; they “are constantly exerting pressure on all that we know and do;” and in

¹²² Serene Jones and Paul Lakeland, eds., *Constructive Theology: A Contemporary Approach to Classical Themes* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 11, “Introduction.”

most if not all instances, they profoundly shape “not only how we perceive our world but also how we engage and respond to it.”¹²³ By and large, it is about faith seeking to understand itself better in the light of emergent contexts and situations.

Therefore, identity and the truth of any religion are best discovered only in going beyond itself (the religion) in the encounter and engagement with other faith claims. The other remains a mystery since that other cannot be exhausted in advance and so opens the possibility of new awareness and understanding in the encounter. Indeed, it is the other that brings about the finding of the identity of the self; that is to say, identity is neither static nor possessed in an essentialist fashion, it is rather constructed in and gifted by the encounter.¹²⁴ For without the other, the self ends up in an aching melancholic loneliness and narcissistic vision of the self. Authentic personhood is “being” understood as communion,¹²⁵ being-in-relationship in accordance with the African axiom, “I am because we are and we are because I am.” Precisely as the subject of freedom and awareness, one’s personality develops as one becomes aware and relates to others as equally other centers of freedom, value, significance, and awareness. As we have amply demonstrated in Chapter 3, it is the relational and life-giving Spirit who creates and constitutes the interrelatedness and interconnectedness of the created order in a cosmic harmony.¹²⁶ The relational Spirit is thus the creator and constructor of personality,

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ See Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Simon & Scuster, 1970), 54-5; idem, *Between Man and Man*, trans. Maurice Friedman (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965), 7

¹²⁵ See John D. Zizioulas, *Being As Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985).

¹²⁶ See Chapter 3, sec. 3.2.6: “The Work of Rûah as Creator Spirit.”

drawing human persons ever further beyond themselves, to give of themselves to others. She is indeed, the principle of “beyondness,”¹²⁷ ever drawing us beyond ourselves into deeper relationships with others and with the world. This work of drawing out into deeper relationships and interconnectedness is a unique role of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit draws us out beyond ourselves in order to creatively engage the other; to use our actualized destinies for the well-being of others; and possibly, to dislodge or overcome whatever oppresses or prevents them from actualizing their own destinies.

AICs know very well this work of the Spirit and have tapped into these helpful elements of African ancestral heritage to make themselves real familial communities of brotherhood/ sisterhood where everyone is cared for and recognized for who they are with regard to their charisms in the spirit of relationality and solidarity. Whereas, in most mainline missionary churches (ensuing from their colonial legacies), there hangs a pall of anonymity and an apparent loss of African communalistic and familistic root paradigm.¹²⁸ In AICs, the previously marginalized and subalternized have been given both visibility and audibility. In this way, AICs have shown that ATR can creatively and fruitfully engage Christianity in a way that benefits and enriches both. Unlike Christendom and mainline missionary churches which have always subordinated women and have continued to wield the coloniality of power in oppressive and repressive ways, for instance, AICs rather harness the dynamism, the plurality, and relational tenets of ATR (in which women could be priestesses) in a way that empowers everybody (women,

¹²⁷ Shorter, *Jesus and the Witchdoctor*, 29; see also John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God: The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973).

¹²⁸ Walter C. Ihejirika, *From Catholicism to Pentecostalism: Role of Nigerian Televangelists in Religious Conversion* (Port Harcourt, Nigeria: University of Port Harcourt Press, 2006), 121-2.

men, young, and old). This remains a challenge to the mainline churches in Africa in general and especially to the Nigerian Catholic Church in particular where a conservative hierarchy and clergy still exercise authority in a Tridentine fashion. It is also a reminder that because the Christian faith of a majority of African Christians (whether they are conscious or unconscious of it) is formed against the backdrop of ATR, therefore, its (ATR's) religious and spiritual presuppositions must be taken seriously by any African Christian theology. Accordingly, all that is being accomplished in AICs is attributed to the work of the Spirit who determines who should be what (whether man or woman) in these churches. Keeping in mind this emphasis on the Spirit, we now explore certain ecclesiological implications of an African relational pneumatology.

5.7 African Relational Pneumatology: Ecclesiological Implications

From all that has been said so far in this work, it should be evident that any treatment of pneumatology from an African perspective has to include a relational pneumatology of wholeness and abundant life. As explicated above, on the basis of relationality as a core tenet and organizing framework of the Etche, and for that matter, West African cosmo-religious space, wholeness embraces the integral wellbeing of not only the individual but also the community, the society, and indeed, the whole cosmic order. Since all of these are interconnected and complementary, true religion, according to John Pobee, “requires a person to show deep and genuine concern for the well-being of...[all].¹²⁹ Wholeness and health touch on the physical, psychological, socio-economic, political, spiritual, and ecological dimensions of human existence in the world.

¹²⁹ Pobee, *Toward an African Theology*, 26.

Clearly, on the path toward integral wellbeing is the realization of destiny. But even the realization of destiny is comprehensible only within the matrix of relationality. Indeed, Eboussi Boulaga seemingly conceives destiny in terms of death; to die to oneself, to one's individuality, to one's private consciousness, and thus, to become a presence henceforward to and for others and the community.¹³⁰ Relationality not only guides the relationship between God as the Unoriginate Origin and the entire creation but is also the determining criterion of interaction among the different beings that populate West African cosmo-religious universe. Reality is construed in a holistic sense as a complex interplay of multidimensions irreducible simply to a monistic, universalistic, or dualistic perspective. The oftentimes overemphasized necessity of holiness on earth (in Christianity) in order to reach heaven, undoubtedly, tends to "drive a wedge between the sacred and the secular, the former representing God, the latter the world, as if the latter had no real value in relation to the former."¹³¹ The Etche and West African world-views rather conceive the universe in sacramental terms and that the whole of life and indeed, all of reality, are to be seen in the light of God's relational love and engagement with humanity and the world. To be sure, the "unseen powers are held to be active also in the natural world."¹³² This understanding dethrones abstract absolutism. Beyond monism, dualism, universalism/ uniformism that disregards the dignity of equality-in-difference, reality is composed of a dynamic, fluid complex unity. This relational conception of

¹³⁰ Fabien Eboussi Boulaga, *Christianity without Fetishes: An African Critique and Recapture of Christianity* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1984), 146-7.

¹³¹ Kwesi A. Dickson, *Theology in Africa* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1984), 7.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 49.

reality has its source in the relational sovereignty of God whose dynamic rather than static hierarchy allows for the devolution of power to the divinities, spirits, and ancestors. Within this God's relational dynamic sovereignty, the wide dispersal of power allows for "power-with," plurilateral collaboration, participation, and hence, for solidarity and freedom rather than a unidimensional consumerism. In this relational framework which creates space for pluriversality, flexibility, and multiplicity, the multiplicity of spirits speaks to God's manifold ways of executing or fulfilling his universal salvific purpose and the actualization of destinies in life with regard to the wellbeing of humanity and all creation.

The Etche/West African cosmo-religious conception of God's dynamic sovereignty and diffusion of power, in a way, preserves God's hiddenness or transcendence. God's presence is neither experienced as a direct presence nor is it limited to any particular privileged place but rather pervasive. God's mode of relating to humans and the world is experienced as a presence-absence or a transcendence-immanence. God who is pervasively present through the Universal Spirit is at the same time distant. This way of conceiving God preserves the divine mystery without reducing God to an idol contrary to the early missionary impulse and to the current fulfillment paradigm of the Catholic Church (which tends to suggest that we can control or manipulate where or not God is to be fully present). If God's love and infinite goodness is made available to everyone and to all peoples, then ATR is no exception. The human orientation to the divine which, of course, is always originally initiated by the divine itself, is no prerogative of any group or tradition. As Bernard Lonergan puts it: "it is the grace that God offers to all humans that underpins what is good in the religions of

humankind....”¹³³ Perhaps it is worth stressing that this pervasive presence of God’s immanence in the world mediated by the Spirit is, in all circumstances, a saving grace.¹³⁴ An awareness of the pervasive availability of saving grace allows for openness to plurality and collaboration in the understanding of the fulfilling of divine economy. Such a relational understanding projects an African matrix that internally constitutes not only a rich repertoire of wisdom, knowledge, deep mystical and spiritual experience, but also a vital space for welcoming otherness and diverse modes of reasoning, creativity and other perspectives from without. Furthermore, the hiddenness of God allows for the actualization of human destiny and responsibility, as well as for the translatability and reconfiguration of narratives in the light of the encounter with other cultures in a dynamic and pluralistic context.

With regard to human destiny, the Etche and other West African anthropological assumptions present an interesting perspective. An important concept in the Etche anthropological framework is what is known as *chi*. *Chi*, as indicated in Chapter 2,¹³⁵ is a term which captures, among others, all that God has in store for each person from conception: gifts, talents, fortune, plans, and indeed, destiny. However, even though a person is assigned a unique *chi* (as destiny) at conception, the Etche also believe that God equally sends his own spirit (that is, *chi* as guardian-spirit) to indwell that person in order to guard, administer, activate, and implement God’s plans and destiny for that person. The guardian-spirit as *chi*, without seeking to conflate all persons into sameness,

¹³³ Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 360.

¹³⁴ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 83.

¹³⁵ See Chapter 2, sec. 2.3.2: “The Relational Understanding of the Human person in Etche.”

rather activates and empowers each particular person to actualize his/her own distinctive possibilities, peculiar gifts, talents, and indeed, specific destiny. *Chi* is thus the symbol of individual creativity. Individuals are the architects of their own destiny, albeit, in collaboration with their guardian-spirit, for “*onye kwe chi ya ekwe*” (by implication, if one is not ready to actualize one’s destiny, neither will one’s *chi* do otherwise), and one can actually bargain or negotiate with one’s *chi*. The upshot is that the guardian-spirit mobilizes each person to use his/her actualized particular destiny for the service of others and the community. Put another way, destiny realization always has a social orientation. Again, it is also interesting to note that the divinities and other spirits, depending on their area of competency, can mount or possess certain individuals in order to call them to special vocations, for example, as *dibias*, priests/priestesses, diviners, and healers. Such vocations usually require some form of apprenticeship over a period of time in order to be equipped through the actualization of such vocation and to in turn use it to serve others.¹³⁶ By and large, the spirit engenders persons to go beyond themselves and to dissipate themselves for others; to use their actualized destinies to defend and promote life, and to dislodge all evil and death-dealing forces; and to ensure wholeness and cosmic harmony in our interconnected world. Each person is therefore, considered to be of value and with actualized destinies that have a social and cosmic orientation.

Additionally, an Etche apothegm says: “*chi abughi otu*” meaning that *chi* is not one but that there is a multiplicity of *chi* in the sense that each person is uniquely and

¹³⁶ I have already mentioned in Chapter 2 that although the diviners and *dibias* are equipped with mystical power and knowledge for the good and well-being of others, such power could, nevertheless, be abused and used for antisocial end to harm others. Yet, this possibility of abuse does not detract from the positive use of mystical power just as the manifestation of sin does not prevent us from affirming the power of good. See Chapter 2, sec. 2.3.1.: “Mediation in Etche-African Cosmo-Religious Universe.”

differently gifted and endowed by God. Through the modality of beyondness and self-dissipation for others, everybody and the community benefit from actualized individual particular destinies. If one of the ways to the divine is by prayer, self-sacrifice, and love of one's neighbor (including the stranger, *Oghaghaa*), then one might even describe these as acts of faith insofar as they are oriented to the Mystery who is both love and awe (*tremendum et fascinans*).¹³⁷ Faith, as Lonergan suggests, is "the eye of religious love, an eye that can discern God's self-disclosure."¹³⁸ Through the actualization of destiny, a person becomes oriented toward love of others and God particularly in the case of the *Oghaghaa* as revelatory of Divinity. Thus love of God is inseparable from love of others. The actualization of destiny enables love through self-transcendence and self-dissipation. Since one of the fruits of the Universal Holy Spirit is love, then one here discovers or rather discerns in Etche/West African religious space, evidence of the presence or working of the Holy Spirit and what is truly of God because God is love. John, in his Epistle is right on target when he writes: "let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.' 'No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.' 'God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him'" (1 Jn 5:7-8,12,16). At the heart of Etche religious universe, therefore, is self-transcendence obtained through destiny realization for love of God and neighbor. Although there may be aberrations sometimes, such do not

¹³⁷ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (London, Oxford, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), esp. chap. 4-6.

¹³⁸ Lonergan, *Method*, 119.

detract from the positive use of destiny. Destiny realization thus promotes relationality and diversity which lie at the core of human-divine confrontation. When individuals in a community or society realize their destinies and put them at the service of all, then, the society itself, by so doing, realizes its collective destiny especially under the guidance of good leadership.

In the light of these excellent qualities of spirit-experience in Etche/West African cosmo-religious matrix, an authentic African Christian pneumatology will not be complete without appropriating and cross-fertilizing itself with them. One sees in such a pneumatology a rich source for renewing the church, a church that will become an agent of social transformation and the re-envisioning and building of a new and healthy African society. If *chi* is a symbol of destiny, creativity, and resourcefulness for reinventing our future, and if we are all endowed with it, what then has been stifling our creativity as Africans? Could it be that the radical value and core tenet of relationality has been eroded away by the onslaughts of neoliberal individualism and the tyranny of enduring coloniality and corruption? What can we do to overcome all the forces of evil, death, and decay that have been stifling our creativity in order to transform our societies? How can the church be instrumental toward this needed change and transformation? In what follows, these questions will guide our exploration in the light of the relational Creator Spirit and Giver of life who is as well the resistant and prophetic God's Holy Spirit. It should be clear at this point that from an African Christian pneumatological perspective, the excellent qualities discernible in Etche/West-African spirit experiences are assimilated and reworked into the work of the Universal Holy Spirit who has been operative in different cultures in manifold ways even before the coming of Christ. But as

Christians, the Holy Spirit leads us to Christ, and through him we have access to the Father; indeed, “it is through the Spirit that one experiences the Son and the Father.”¹³⁹ She is the relational Spirit of communion. And as the Spirit of communion, she does not nullify diversity and difference. Indeed, communion is possible because of difference. To be sure, what the Spirit of communion engenders is equality-in-difference just as she is the principle of communion in the Tri-unity. The ecclesiological implications of this for the African church in general and the Nigerian local church in particular cannot be overemphasized. In order to avoid speaking too generically, I will focus more on the Nigerian context here as a case in point. The following points to be made would serve both as a highlight of the issues as well as my suggestions as to a way forward.

Areas of Progress: The Nigerian local church that would bear authentic witness and be a prophetic instrument for the Spirit the Giver of life in the Nigerian milieu, to my mind, has to necessarily actualize its own destiny. There is no question that in the aftermath of the recovery of the place and theology of the local church during the Second Vatican Council, the Nigerian church has made some progress toward becoming a truly local church. I have dealt with this issue elsewhere.¹⁴⁰ Other areas include the role of Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) in speaking out through a series of communiqués in defense of democracy and human rights especially during the oppressive military dictatorships in Nigeria; and in the face of ethnic and religious

¹³⁹ Kilian McDonnell, *The Other Hand of God: The Holy Spirit as the Universal Touch and Goal* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2003), 11.

¹⁴⁰ See my article, Okechukwu C. Njoku, “Vatican II and the Rediscovery of the Local Church: Significance for the African Church,” *International Journal of African Catholicism* 3, no. 1 (Winter 2012):81-97.

violence and hostility.¹⁴¹ These and more are indeed signs of hope for a local church that is evolving to become truly viable and relevant to the local concerns and needs of Nigerian Christians. However, in certain important and core areas of church life, the Nigerian church does not seem to be too ready to radically and boldly become truly a local church. Some of those areas and what needs to be done would be highlighted in what follows.

Ecclesial Structures and Authority: One of such core areas has to do with the leadership and power structure of the Nigerian church. Notwithstanding the achievements of Vatican II, the pyramidal structure of the Nigerian church (and other West African churches) modeled on colonial Christianity, has been, the greatest impediment to the emergence of a dynamic adult local church. Aylward Shorter rightly avers: “The [African] churches seem to be very reluctant to change, operating as they do through outmoded authoritarian structures and impersonal law systems”¹⁴² bequeathed as colonial Christian legacies. It is not an overstatement that the Nigerian church hierarchy or leadership is too power and authority conscious and operates according to a command structure that remains faithful to European feudalistic Christianity with no sign of readiness for change by de-cloaking itself of such enervating garb. This is a reminder that coloniality is still well and alive everywhere and in our time. Such a structure continues to stifle local creativity, initiative, critical thinking, and responsibility—in

¹⁴¹ For a collection of such communiqués, see Peter Schineller, ed., *The Voice of the Voiceless*, Pastoral Letters and Communiqués of The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria 1960-2002 (Ibadan, Nigeria: Daily Graphics, 2002).

¹⁴² Aylward Shorter, *African Culture and the Christian Church: An Introduction to Social and Pastoral Anthropology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1974), 23.

order to keep in step with doctrinal assertions¹⁴³ that oftentimes have not the African/Nigerian contexts in mind in their phraseology—without which a dynamic and mature local church may not emerge. All this is in a bid to be more in conformism to Rome than a bold effort to confront the local situation. Hence, *Roma locuta est causa finita* appears to be the lodestar as the Nigerian church leadership tends to cling to an uncritical conservatism and traditionalism¹⁴⁴ at the expense of new interpretations and radical reworking of an inherited post-Western Christianity that is increasingly becoming a World Christianity. The Nigerian church appears to have taken refuge in conservatism perhaps as the only way to preserve the unity of the church. What is eliminated from view is that “the role of the church is not to preserve unity at all costs”¹⁴⁵ but to preach and stand by the liberating good news at all costs, and sometimes at the cost of unity (especially imposed unity that has no relevance to a local context). After all, Jesus was not concerned to preserve unity at all costs: “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household” (Matt 10:34-36). Jesus did not ignore the status quo in order to preserve unity at all costs. How can a truly local church emerge and actualize its own destiny if it does not take a bold

¹⁴³ This is not about a rejection of doctrines. Perhaps I need to stress that sound doctrines must be maintained and practiced in the church especially as a safeguard against abuse in the light of those, according to Apostle Paul, whose ears itch for strange teachings (cf. Tit 1:11; 2:1; 2 Tim 4:3). However, preserving doctrines is not the same thing as exaggerated and irrational fear of novelty in order to be faithful to Rome at the expense of local needs and signs of the times.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid; see also, Njoku, “Vatican II and the Rediscovery of the Local Church,” 74.

¹⁴⁵ Albert Nolan, *God in South Africa: The Challenge of the Gospel* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1988), 215.

step to unleash its own creative imagination and unsubject its own epistemic potential that have been subalternized for too long? Decolonizing church structures in the Nigerian church today remains, according to Chukwudum Okolo, an imperative.¹⁴⁶

Perhaps it might be helpful to suggest that for the church in Africa on the whole and in Nigeria in particular to bear credible prophetic witness to Christ and to be instrument for the life-giving Spirit, it needs to seriously reform its leadership structures especially in the light of traditional African leadership structures.¹⁴⁷ Besides, to my mind, church structures would benefit from the dynamic, relational, pluralist, dispersed, and collaborative model as I have delineated in Etche/West African cosmo-religious universe. For a church that must contribute to the transformation of the legacy of the coloniality of power which has simply metamorphosed into neocolonial autochthonous oppressive elitism in Nigeria and Africa; for a church that must be instrumental in working out an alternative for the building of a new African society, transforming its own authoritarian and power conscious structures is a necessity.

Autonomy and Financial Self-Reliance: Another core area where the Nigerian church has been failing to grow into an adult status as a local church is in the aspect of financial self-reliance. Recognizing the paramount importance of this with regard to

¹⁴⁶ See Chukwudum B. Okolo, *Toward Decolonizing the Church: An African Liberation Theology* (Onitsha, Nigeria: Tabansi Press, 1976).

¹⁴⁷ Such leadership structures which are relational, dynamic, and participatory, are concerned with the representation and holistic wellbeing of the complete community in both “flesh and spirits” (that is, spiritual, material, social, religious, political, economic, psychological, and, in fact, cosmic wellbeing). As Kwesi Dickson observes, there are at least two traditional leadership(political) structures or systems in Africa. While some African societies have kings or chiefs, others, like the Kikuyu of East Africa, have ruling councils of elders. Each political system is oriented towards enabling individuals, families, and communities to “attain goals that ensure the welfare of all.” See Dickson, *Theology in Africa*, 70.

autonomy, it is no wonder that the church of East Africa, for instance, under the auspices of Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of East Africa (AMECEA) made a resolution to groom their own autonomy expressed in a three-point initiative: to become a responsible church that would be self-ministering, self-propagating, and self-supporting. It is not surprising that the East African church has made more progress in terms of reworking Christianity in the light of local needs. Apart from more inculturation and theological exploration taking place there, one of the areas of serious progress include the establishment of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in 1976 for grass-roots mobilization of the church. But this very initiative is also imperiled by the problem of clerical exercise of power and control. A lot more is required not only for the Nigerian church but for all African churches. The veracity of the maxim that “he who pays the piper dictates the tune” cannot be truer in the Nigerian, and for that matter, the African context. I have equally treated elsewhere the issue of the funding of all African bishops entirely by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and its implications for the local church.¹⁴⁸ It only needs to be said that “this type of scenario undoubtedly creates a vicious circle of dependency which saps the African church leadership of the nerve for boldness, self-confidence, and for standing its ground in the face of contentious issues”¹⁴⁹ as well as in engaging African creative imagination in experimenting in order to give Christianity a true and not artificial African face. The Nigerian/African church cannot contribute effectively in fashioning a new destiny for the African society if does not first of all reform its own structures and take control of its

¹⁴⁸ Njoku, “Vatican II and the Rediscovery of the Local Church,” 75.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

own creative ingenuity and power of imagination.

Therefore, we suggest that the Nigerian church should seek for ways to become more self-supporting in order to overcome the whole mentality of mendicancy and logic of extroversion (always looking outward for the scraps falling from the master's table). It needs to achieve a certain level of self-reliance for its normal organization and for the task of promoting every aspect of its catechesis and overall evangelization without looking outward. I do not intend here to suggest that not looking outward is antipathetic to relationality or the "beyondness" inspired by the relational Spirit. Rather, it is a way of insisting that any outward orientation has to be about solidarity of others—which is devoid of any form of paternalism that creates dependency—necessary to engaging in such relationships genuinely within the matrix of equality-in-difference. Undoubtedly, genuine friendship is only possible within a framework of a balance of power, lest it degenerates into an ideology, domination, and totalization. It is understandable in times of emergency that the church can receive from elsewhere and perhaps for special tasks; but not for Nigerian/African bishops to rely or depend greatly on the outside by carrying caps in hand begging Rome and the churches in Europe and North America for its funding. Until the Nigerian church becomes financially self-reliant, the leadership will continue to be timid and fearful of making bold and radical attempts in carving a niche for its own contextual theologies (as it seeks to understand and express its own concrete lived faith experiences), church life, structures, catechesis, spirituality, and so forth. It is time to start resisting and rejecting the disguised ecclesiastical economic structures that support the colonality of power with its production of knowledge about Africa as a perpetual mission territory. As Matthew Kukah has admonished, we must not "continue

to pretend that we can found an African church without proposing a comprehensive programme of economic survival in Africa.”¹⁵⁰ This must be the course of action in order to liberate African churches from the clutches of paternalism and to break the cycle of dependency. The African churches will continue to be emasculated and their dignity and self-respect remain elusive until they attain a certain level of economic self-reliance. Kä Mana is right in saying that when a people, and for that matter, a church, fails to actualize its own destiny and claim its autonomy, then no one takes it seriously: “When a people exhibits a lack of faith in their own worth, they devalue themselves and are reduced to an inferior status where they receive and do not give in return. This gives others the impression that they have nothing to offer or that what they have to give is so insignificant that it does not add any value to their presence in the world.”¹⁵¹ It is difficult to disagree with Marx that the one who controls the material or economic power (structure) also controls the spiritual power.

Unless the Nigerian church is able to actualize its own destiny which fosters its own autonomy, it would not be able to go beyond itself to adequately help others to actualize theirs. It is only by striving to attain certain level of self-reliance that the Nigerian local church can become a giving church to other local churches in more need. The church will be hampered or will fail to bear authentic prophetic witness especially in the current Nigerian situation where people are confronted with the dead-dealing forces of corruption, hunger, poverty, and other spiritual malaise in need of healing and

¹⁵⁰ Matthew H. Kukah, *The Church and the Politics of Social Responsibility* (Lagos, Nigeria: Sovereign, 2007), 200.

¹⁵¹ Kä Mana, *Christians and Churches of Africa: Salvation in Christ and Building a New African Society* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Press, 2004), 17.

wholeness without becoming self-reliant and self-reforming. A church that actualizes its own destiny is not afraid of engaging in prophetic witness. The outpouring of the Spirit is for boldness, not timidity, and to jolt the church to move beyond itself to reach out and to dissipate itself for others, to proclaim salvation and liberation in continuation of the mission and in imitation of Jesus who was anointed and sent by the Spirit to preach the good news to the poor, liberty to captives, freedom to the oppressed, and to give away himself completely for others.

Middle-Class Image and Alignment with Power: Because of the inability of the Nigerian church to attain a certain level of self-support, among other things, there have been, not infrequently, cases of recourse to politicians who dole out fat cash and material gifts to churches; the same duplicitous politicians who embezzle public funds meant for the development and wellbeing of their people. Perhaps a certain prestige and other fringe benefits that come with forging such unwholesome ties with those in the corridors of power may have been stifling the churches' prophetic power to subvert life-denying forces. This remains a part of the legacy of coloniality which goes back to the colonial times when the missionary churches "often worked closely with the colonial government in various areas...."¹⁵² In connection with the alignment of most of those missionaries of Africa and the colonial powers, Shorter observes with candor "that the flag followed the cross in the initial process of colonization."¹⁵³ Although active colonialism is ended, and today, we have historic churches led by African church leaders; the truth of the matter

¹⁵² Dickson, *Theology in Africa*, 101.

¹⁵³ Aylward Shorter, *Cross and Flag in Africa: The "White Fathers" during the Colonial Scramble 1892-1914* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2006), 24.

remains that there still has been, according Dickson, “a tendency, consciously or unconsciously, to perpetuate something of that colonial era alignment between the church and the ruling powers. For one thing the church in Africa tends to have a middle-class image.”¹⁵⁴

In our post-colonial times, the Christian church today, particularly in Nigeria, continues to perpetuate the coloniality of power that characterized the church in the colonial situation.¹⁵⁵ It is not surprising that beyond denunciations in communiqués by the Nigerian church leadership, prophetic witness, in the face of injustice and unacceptable poverty in the midst of plenty, is negligible if not nonexistent. It is also not surprising that certain church officials sing the praises of politicians instead of standing up practically and prophetically against their political abuses. Whatever constitutes obstacles in the way of people’s actualizing their God given destiny and wellbeing must never be tolerated by the church. If the Nigerian church must become an instrument for the life-giving and resistant Spirit, then it must go beyond mere verbal communiqué¹⁵⁶ denunciations to a more active commitment in the struggles of the people. Most church officials, because of the structure or mechanism through which they are provided for, are shielded from the actual quotidian experiences of their poor flock in the society. In point of fact, it has been noted that “Some bishops have actually ceased to be pastors and ‘have become mini governors [as in a political sense], ruling vast conglomerate of agencies and

¹⁵⁴ Dickson, *Theology in Africa*, 101.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ See Peter Schineller, ed., *The Voice of the Voiceless*.

offices and schools....”¹⁵⁷ Church leaders as shepherds must realize that they are called to serve and to give away themselves totally for others rather than to be served or be self-serving. For self-interest and aggrandizement, church leadership—either in the church itself, in Religious Houses and Congregations, or in other ecclesiastical institutions—has not infrequently been enmeshed in the throes of dirty politics in the church all in a bid to cling to power. In this way, it cannot bear effective prophetic witness that would transform society. If the Nigerian church must be a credible witness then, we suggest, it must not only be a church of the poor but also a church on the side of the poor, the marginalized, and the powerless and voiceless by sharing much more intimately in their miseries and sufferings. The Nigerian church leadership, to be credible, must “have a fuller understanding of living in the Holy Spirit, for this also means being committed to a lifestyle of solidarity with the poor and oppressed and involvement in action with them.”¹⁵⁸ This is what it means to say that the church is the “Flesh of Christ,” the sacrament of Christ, as aforementioned.

The Challenge of Holistic Gospel: The Nigerian church must appropriate the values of ATR and as assimilated by AICs. ATR has a more holistic view of life and reality in the sense that religion is not limited to the supernatural but actually interpenetrates every segment of life and creation as a sacramental universe. This saves ATR and AICs from Marx’s indictment of religion as the opium of the masses. As Jean-Marc Èla has put it succinctly: “Here religion is not reducible to a relationship with the

¹⁵⁷ J. A. Omoyajowo, *Cherubim and Seraphim: The History of an African Independent Church* (New York: Nok Publishers, 1982), 151-2, cited in Udoette, “New Religious Movements in Nigeria,” *The Search*, 43.

¹⁵⁸ Torres and Fabella, *The Emergent Gospel*, 270.

supernatural. It emerges as a social force as well. It provides the wherewithal for a protest against the established order.”¹⁵⁹ It is in this way that the Nigerian church becomes a leaven. In order for the church’s prophetic denunciations to be valid, incisive, effective, and to not be reduced to mere hollow booming gongs, then they must emerge truly and “only from within the heart of the struggle for a more human world.”¹⁶⁰ Only by sharing intimately in the sufferings of the people and participating deeply in their struggles against oppression, domination, poverty, and injustice “can we understand the implications of the gospel message and make it have an impact in history. The preaching of the word will be empty and ahistorical if it tries to avoid this dimension.”¹⁶¹ Donatus Udoette is right on the mark when he underlines: “If the message of the Gospel is to be good news to the poor it has to be accompanied by practical solutions to the problems of the poor. In fact, verbal preaching of the good news and its concrete realization by way of alleviating the deplorable human conditions of the poor are inseparable.”¹⁶² Again, the church has often taken refuge in rituals, liturgy, and sacramental celebrations that are divorced from the hard realities of quotidian experiences of the people. Did not the Old Testament prophets repudiate and “confront the religious establishment of their own time with the irrelevance, emptiness, and even the blasphemy of their sacrifices and

¹⁵⁹ Jean-Marc Èla, *African Cry*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2005), 48.

¹⁶⁰ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 15th Anniv. ed., ed. and trans. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2005), 152.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 153-4.

¹⁶² Udoette, “New Religious Movements in Nigeria,” *The Search*, 44.

ceremonies”¹⁶³ while being blind to injustice and lack of right judgment? (cf. Isa 1:11-17; 58:1-12; Jer 6:19-20; Amos 5:21-24). The church engages in this role in society not because it (the church) is an alternative to political structure and power but simply as a part and parcel of its mission in service of the public good. In a very fascinating and reassuring way, the post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Africae Munus* captures it all when it states that in faithfulness to the lesson of life Christ taught us (which includes not only the gift of abundant life through the Spirit but also the prophetic resistance to whatever diminishes that life), the church in Africa:

feels the duty to be present wherever human suffering exists and to make heard the silent cry of the innocent who suffer persecution, or of peoples whose governments mortgage the present and the future for personal interests. Through her ability to see the face of Christ on the face of children, the sick, the needy and those who suffer, the Church is helping slowly but surely to forge a new Africa. In her prophetic role, whenever peoples cry out to her: “Watchman, what of the night?” (Is 21:11), the Church wants to be ready to give a reason for the hope she bears within her (cf. *1 Pet* 3:15), because a new dawn is breaking on the horizon (cf. *Rev* 22:5). Only by rejecting people’s dehumanization and every compromise prompted by fear of suffering or martyrdom can the cause of the Gospel of truth be served.¹⁶⁴

This very important statement has profound implications for the Nigerian and African church. The lesson of life which Jesus taught us is, among others, that he matched his words with deed/action. He did not speak in one way and act another way. He spoke out in defense of the subaltern, the oppressed, the marginalized, the silenced, and the rejected of the society in his time from both social and especially religious oppression and suppression (in the name of purity of religious traditions of the system of

¹⁶³ Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 212.

¹⁶⁴ Benedict XIV, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Africae Munus* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2011), § 30.

purity and holiness). Indeed, “Jesus identified himself with the victims of oppression, thus exposing the reality of sin. Liberating them from the power of sin and reconciling them with God and with one another, he restored them to the fullness of their humanity.”¹⁶⁵ One of the reasons for his martyrdom was not only his predilection for the poor, the so-called sinners, and the excluded, but more so because of his solidarity and total identification with them. This brought him into conflicts with the establishment and the powers that be. To be sure, “what brought Jesus to his death...is precisely the coherence [of his] message and commitment.”¹⁶⁶ Martyrdom today entails the church leadership dying to itself, dissipating itself, and not merely in predilection for the poor and the oppressed suffering, but in actual concrete gesture of standing up for the poor against the established order even to the point of death. Unless and until church shepherds, in imitation of Christ, are ready to die in defense of the poor and oppressed in the power of the Spirit, as well as inextricably engaged in the mission “for the realization of the wholeness of the human person,”¹⁶⁷ the transformation of African society will keep receding from the horizon. The fear of martyrdom or suffering, we suggest, must not make the church balk at preaching the good news and announcing the reign of God with all its scandal. The Gospel message should prophetically unveil sin that lies at the roots of social evils and injustice, and call it by its name as well as its perpetrators. This is what the church is empowered by the prophetic and resistant Spirit to do in order to unearth and perhaps to overcome the alienations that rupture our *koinonia* as the adopted children

¹⁶⁵ Torres and Fabella, *The Emergent Gospel*, 270.

¹⁶⁶ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, xliii.

¹⁶⁷ Torres and Fabella, *The Emergent Gospel*, 270.

of the one Father. For without doing this, then the perpetrators will carry on oppressing and exploiting, and the apathy of those who sin by doing nothing will go on unchallenged.

The Challenge of Diversity and the Empowerment of the Laity: From a relational pneumatological vantage point, the Nigerian church is invited to recognize difference and diversity. This applies both *ad intra* and *ad extrin* relation to the church. Internally, the Spirit of communion invites a model of being church in which both the institutional and charismatic aspects and gifts which are both co-instituted by Christ and the Spirit are organized and put at the service of the community. The outpouring of the Spirit anoints and empowers all for service to the common good. As Apostle Paul says it: “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (*1 Cor* 12:4-7). Nigerian church leadership must come to appreciate the significance of this biblical teaching coupled with the African relational understanding of reality as has been amply x-rayed in this corpus: “I am because we are and we are because I am.” We all need the gift of each other for the good of all. This means also that “One can never be a Christian alone. The gifts given by the Lord to each – bishops, priests, deacons and religious, catechists and lay people – must all contribute to harmony, communion and peace in the Church herself and in society.”¹⁶⁸ This also means that each person, especially the lay faithful must be given the opportunity to actualize and use their own gifts maximally in the building up of the church without the clergy feeling

¹⁶⁸ Benedict XIV, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Africae Munus*, § 97.

threatened and clamping down on them. While proper discernment must not be neglected, ulterior motives must not be disguised to quench the Spirit. Rather, wherever and in whomever the Spirit is at work, the church is invited to join in and celebrate it. A Nigerian local church of the future that would be viable and stand the test of time is a church that harnesses the talents of all the members especially the lay faithful by involving them at the level of church decision-making and implementation as well as in the very process of defining what authentic Christian faith is about, rather than being treated as mere spectators of the clergy. Vatican II is right in designating the church the “people of God” which includes both clergy and the laity. The model of the church as the people of God invites that sensitiveness and respect must be shown to the human dignity and equality of all the people in the church by virtue of the common baptism of all in Christ. The Nigerian church is challenged to become a family of God expanded beyond kinship ties by the Holy Spirit through whom we have become the adopted daughters and sons of the one Father in Christ; a family where everyone is made welcomed in spite of our differences.

In addition, part of the empowerment of the laity that would foster a virile Nigerian local church is for the leadership of the church to educate the laity on their rights both ecclesiastical/canonical rights as well as civil rights. Our lay men and women who are not schooled in the seminary have no clue to what their rights and obligations as enshrined in canon law are all about. Many of us who never passed through law schools and colleges in Nigeria are ignorant of what our constitutional and civil rights are because they are not taught in our primary and secondary schools at least even rudimentarily. In this way, our people perish for lack of knowledge as both the clergy and the political

elites take advantage of this ignorance to be insensitive to the dignity of the people. The onus rests on the church leadership to educate the faithful properly to their rights (canonical and civil). Catechesis and evangelization should go beyond mere memorization of catechism and doctrines, beyond mere verbal preaching to enabling the people to discover their own ability and agency to organize themselves, protect their own basic rights, and take control of their own future by holding their leaders, ecclesiastical and civil, accountable.¹⁶⁹

In the face of today's circumstances, for the Nigerian church to become a virile local community, pastoral agents must confront the issue of empowering the people. Everything we do must involve conscientizing and convincing "the people that they can change their situation, and...restore their power"¹⁷⁰ to resist oppression and injustice. Civic education (not necessarily formal) is a key avenue that can bring about this needed change. An educated faithful would be an asset to the church to the society. Another aspect of this empowerment and education of the faithful is for pastoral agents to incorporate a program aimed at transforming the imagination of Nigerians with alternative narratives. The Nigerian imagination is one that has been battered and warped so much by corruption, beginning from the colonial times through the long regimes of military dictatorships to the dawn of duplicitous neocolonial political elites, that it has become a tragic evil. The cankerworm that Kā Mana describes as "the dictatorship of the

¹⁶⁹ Jean-Marc Èla, *My Faith as an African*, trans. John Pairman Brown and Susan Perry (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 9.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

belly”¹⁷¹ has come to have a firm grip on the Nigerian psyche. Men and women in both public and private service are ready to devalue themselves and accept the unacceptable in view of the quest for quick wealth. This is, of course, what the people see the politicians do everyday as they cart away public funds in bags to stash away and to line their private pockets. The abnormal has become normalized as most people no more appear to take objection to such an anomaly. Rather, most people strive to become politicians or to be affiliated to a politician so as to get a piece of the national cake as the shortest path to get rich quick. That is why some communities are ready to reward a politician from their constituency with chieftaincy titles for embezzling from the public coffer and not necessarily because of what he has done for his community in terms of development.

This devaluation of values has assumed astronomical proportions and the degeneration is no longer excusable. Such traditional values as hardwork, honor, and the reward for hardwork seem to have had the epitaph laid on their grave a long time ago. Because the imagination is so distorted and the people are not ready to hold their leaders accountable, little wonder they are ready to allow dubious politicians who only think and care about their selfish interest to deceive them with paltry gifts of money to shortchange their only power for change, their right to vote. At other times, the same politicians who want to grab the reins of power either by hook or by crook, resort to politicizing religious and ethnic differences for cheap political gains and get away with it at all times. Not surprisingly, the Cameroonian philosopher-theologian, Eboussi Boulaga rightly says: “the people have the leaders they deserve.”¹⁷² The same people who go to churches on Sunday

¹⁷¹ Mana, *Christians and Churches of Africa*, 21.

¹⁷² Cited in *Ibid.*, 13.

are some of the people who on Monday morning accept bribe in their offices in order to render service to someone. Meanwhile, they still receive their salary at the end of the month. It is even worst in the educational sector as teachers would not pass students be they most brilliant in the class except if they give him bribe and buy his handouts. The virus is everywhere in every sector. The driving factor behind all this, to my mind, is the quest for quick wealth without hardwork. It is this very dictatorship of the belly that is also behind the terrible phenomenon of 419 (obtaining by trick) that has sadly given Nigeria a bad image in the world. Because of 419 more so than any other, Nigeria is as one the countries on the United States' FBI crime list. The Nigerian church has enormous responsibility to begin a program of transformation of imagination by educating especially the young and the next generation on the importance of values and virtues such as relationality, hardwork, faith in oneself and the courage to be oneself, promotion of human dignity and creativity, the courage to dream big and for the long term, rectitude, patience and perseverance shunning shortcuts, the courage to think beyond oneself (to think of how one's actualized destiny may benefit others and ones country), hospitality and friendship, respect for difference, respect for the rule of law, and above all, love of God and neighbor. This is a death-dealing situation that invites an urgent attention and the sooner the Nigerian church leadership recognizes it and rises to the occasion, the better for the society. Emphasis on narratives that embody virtues such as those enumerated above would go a long way to help in unlearning these bizarre habits and transforming the imagination. This situation calls for the church to become an instrument for the life-giving Spirit, to become a catalyst for changing lives and a ferment for bringing to birth a new society. The Nigerian imagination is groaning in birth pangs,

waiting for liberation and to be recreated anew by the Creator and life-giving Spirit. “Let anyone who has ears listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches!” (Rev 2:7). The church is urgently summoned to this task of building a new Nigeria, and a new African society.

The Challenge of Interreligious Dialogue and Ecumenism: Ad extra, the Nigerian church will become truly a local church and find its own identity only by engaging other faith perspectives both in ecumenical and interreligious encounter. From colonial times Nigeria has been home to different Christian traditions as they were transplanted from Europe in their splintered conditions and groupings. Ever since then, numerous other Christian groups initiated in Africa (AICs) have also emerged on the scene. Islam has also been there and, as a matter of fact, preceded the advent of Christianity in Nigeria.¹⁷³ Nevertheless, there are still many in Nigeria who practice ATR and those who have no religious persuasion whatsoever. However, as we have established above, the Universal Holy Spirit is operative in the whole world as well as in non-Christian religions. It becomes an invitation to the Nigerian church to become truly local by discovering how to live and witness to its own Christian faith in the context of such a religious plurality in Nigeria. This calls for mutual respect, cooperation, and solidarity of others in the common action of working to resist oppression, injustice, poverty, and the transformation of society. The church has a lot to learn from ATR through cross-fertilization. One such great quality is the value of tolerance, flexibility, and openness to plurality characteristic of God’s dynamic hierarchy.

¹⁷³ See Iheanyi M. Enwerem, *A Dangerous Awakening: The Politicization of Religion in Nigeria* (Ibadan, Nigeria: IFRA, 1995).

In Etche and other West African cosmo-religious narratives, there exists no theogony or theomachy such as is the case in the Mesopotamian myth of the violent war between the gods Marduk and Tiamat or the Roman myth recounted by James Frazer about the god Virbius, the king of the Wood and a lover of Diana the goddess of hunt, who possessed the wood by killing the previous king. It becomes glaring that underneath “the surface of the culture we like to think civilized,” lay violence and barbarism.¹⁷⁴ In Etche/West African cosmologies, albeit God enjoys unparalleled sovereignty as the Creator of all, God is, nonetheless, conceived to be tolerant of and congruous and compatible with the coexistence of a multiplicity of other divinities and spirits who participate in his devolved and dispersed power. The Supreme God is thus projected as accommodating of other deities without usurping their relative independence. It is also this quality of welcoming and accommodating that, among others, made ATR to be open to tolerating other religions. As Turaki rightly argues: “the ready acceptance of Western civilization, Christianity...and Islamic influence proves the fact that the [Nigerian traditional cosmo-religious and cultural space] was accommodative to others and should not be viewed as primitive or inferior.”¹⁷⁵ In fact, Sanneh is on target when he presses home the point that “Africans best responded to Christianity where the indigenous religions were strongest, not weakest, suggesting a degree of compatibility with the gospel;”¹⁷⁶ even though Islam,

¹⁷⁴ See James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, Abridged ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1924); see also Daniel L. Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 2nd ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 34-5.

¹⁷⁵ Y. Turaki, *The Institutionalization of the Inferior Status and Socio-Political Role of the Non-Muslim Groups in the Colonial Hierarchical Structure of the Northern Region of Nigeria* (Boston: Boston University, Ph.D Dissertation), 51, cited in Enwerem, *A Dangerous Awakening*, 21.

¹⁷⁶ Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity?* 18.

like colonial regimes, was suppressive of indigenous religions with brutal force. Different groups may have been involved in conflicts but there was never war in the name of the Supreme God of ATR. The whole question of *Jihad*, holy wars, and Crusade in the name of God—which is not only strange but also a scandal to ATR’s concept of a relational dynamic sovereignty of God—was introduced by Islam and Christianity with each fronting a universal claim to exclusive possession of the only true God. Such an attitude dangerously modifies the image of ATR’s God. It also smacks of religious chauvinism and hubristic triumphalism which is not only disrespectful and exclusive of otherness, but also reduces God to an idol. The unspeakable loss of life and property stemming from a series of dastardly Islamic-Christian conflicts in Nigeria has been of epic proportion. A proper African Christian inculturation of ATR’s experience of a relational God should tame the concept of the god of war prevalent in Islam and the Christian inherited Hebrew Scriptures with its narratives of wars and gruesome decimations of whole populations in the name of the one true god. This agonistic tendency is still been espoused today, albeit in a different form, especially in the militant rhetoric of Nigerian neo-Pentecostalism.¹⁷⁷

However, the perennial significance of the Igbo aphorism cannot be underestimated, which says: “*egbe bere ugo bere; nke si ibe ya ebela, nku kwaa ya*” meaning “may the eagle perch and may the kite perch; let the one that denies the other the right to perch have its wings dislocated.” This is about justice, it is about respect for otherness, it is about recognition of difference, it is about hospitality, friendship, and harmonious living. Despite their differences, both the eagle and the kite all have their space on the same tree. Each has a right to be. It is a reminder that relationality is always the matrix in which

¹⁷⁷ Ihejirika, *From Catholicism to Pentecostalism*.

difference and identity are constructed, negotiated, and reconstructed. There is little doubt that a people who espoused such a wisdom emanating from their lived experience and knowledge would be welcoming to other perspectives. The Nigerian church would benefit from these values by assimilating and translating them into Christian practice in terms of relating with the religious other who is different. Relational pneumatology requires that all manner of proselytizing that demonizes another religious perspective (the kind espoused by neo-Pentecostalism) in order to win a case for God as though, the whole world does not already belong to God, is to be discountenanced. Since West African cosmo-religious world-views present a holistic view of interconnected reality, the relational Spirit also invites respect for creation and the ecosystem. This issue will be taken up in a later work.

The Challenge of Deeper Mystical and Spirit Awareness: One more implication of relational pneumatology for being church in Nigeria and Africa is that a pneumatological vantage point resonates with West African cosmo-religious spirit experience. Whether it is as *chi* or through spirit possession, the notion of spirit in Etche/West African experience brings to mind the nearness of God who is approached as Spirit. The essence of spirit possession or the bestowal of *chi* is for the actualization of destiny, for human divinization, wellbeing, health, and wholeness in the cosmic community as we have illustrated above. As already noted, health and wholeness are important aspects of West African world-view. Health which entails healing, is not merely limited to individual but also to social, communal, and cosmic (which embraces both creation and the supernatural) relations. Mystical power, as we have seen, is in and of itself neutral. But it can be used either negatively to diminish and harm life

or positively to promote life. To the former belong witches, sorcerers, who employ power for destructive purposes. To the latter, on the other hand, belong mediums, *dibias*, *babalawos*, medicine men/women, priests/priestesses, diviners, seers, healers, bone-setters, and so on. The *dibias* are mounted by the spirit and empowered to bring healing of illnesses, diagnose their root causes (especially those linked to witchcraft, sorcery, *nsi* or poison), and prescribe measures for healing relations with the community, the environment, and the supernatural in order to restore harmony. World Christianity in its West African repackaging is taking this spirit experience seriously. As Bediako, who has always endeavored to put developments in African Christianity and theology within the framework of the historical continuum which has always given birth to Christian thought in the New Testament through the early church, writes: “An authentic tradition of literary Christian scholarship can exist only where a living reality of Christian experience is, and is felt to be, relevant to daily life.”¹⁷⁸ The experience of the impact of the negative use of power for evil purpose as well as the possibility of counteracting such evil through the mediation of diviners, *dibias*, *ngangas*, has come to play into the narrative of African Christian understanding of Jesus’ healing ministry in the Bible. The image of the *dibia* or *nganga* with regard to holistic healing, liberating power, and restoration of diminished human life has been assimilated into African Christianity. Such image and other similar concepts open new avenues as they allow a privileged access to African understandings of the meaning and relevance of Jesus and God’s Holy Spirit in relation to sin/evil, salvation, and liberation. African mystical and spiritual experience constitutes a *locus*

¹⁷⁸ Kwame Bediako, “The Significance of Modern African Christianity—A Manifesto,” *Studies in World Christianity* 1, Part 1 (1995): 53.

theologicus that calls for critical reflections in order to nurture an authentic local or contextual theology.

Among West Africans, albeit many have become Christians, the experience of the harmful effect of the negative use of mystical power is one that still looms large in their consciousness. This is helpful in appreciating the mission of Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit as the Savior, liberator, and healer par excellence in African Christianity. The Spirit as the Giver of life anointed Jesus as Savior and as the one who brings integral liberation. Thus, during his ministry, Jesus' mission of liberation included, among others, forgiveness of sins, casting out demons, healing the sick, welcoming the excluded, and restoring or reintegrating them into the community. Did Jesus not actually stretch out his hand to touch and heal lepers who were ostracized and stigmatized (because ritually unclean) in the name of purity of tradition and sent them to go and show themselves to the priest for reintegration into the community? (cf. Matt 8:1-4; Mk 1:40-44; Lk 5:12-14; 17:11-14; see Lev 13:1-2,44-46). It is also legitimate to contend that the gesture of Jesus stretching out his hand to lepers designated as untouchables without fear of becoming ritually unclean himself is a symbol of restoration of friendship and transforming exclusive boundaries into sites for hospitality and love. In this way, Jesus did not only heal people from their physical, spiritual, and psychological brokenness but also healed broken social relationships by restoring the silenced and ultimately, engendering reconciliation with God. This is holistic liberation. Perhaps at this point I need to stress the fact that Jesus was not merely a miracle or wonderworker. Nor did he simply settle for the miraculous. Rather, the miracles, the healings, and exorcisms, were signs as well as parts and parcel of his overall mission as the one who definitively inaugurates in

history the dawn of the reign of God with its scandals and unmaskings as elaborately articulated in Chapter 3. Therefore, it is difficult not to be in agreement with Canadian theologian, Diane Stinton, when she writes: “the holistic approach to healing in African tradition may foster insight into biblical affirmations regarding Jesus’ healing ministry as signifying the inauguration of the kingdom of God in all its individual, corporate, and cosmic dimensions.”¹⁷⁹

Beyond the limitations of modern medical science (without discounting its usefulness and advantages) which shows no interest in the social, spiritual, moral, and environmental dimensions of integral healing, *dibias* and healers in African tradition not only look at possible physical causes of sickness but also consider the spiritual, psychological, social, and cosmic aspects in order to bring about holistic healing. Moreover, the traditional conception of the interconnectedness of reality and the continual traffic between the invisible and the visible realms engender the belief among West Africans that what happens in the physical, social, economic, and political order can be influenced spiritually through the manipulation of mystical powers for evil ends. This African conception is by no means misplaced. It resonates with the Pauline conception of the powers, dominions, thrones, principalities that incarnate physically in political and economic structures, institutions, and systems that oppress, dominate, and diminish human lives. Walter Wink, Professor of New Testament Interpretation, in his trilogy, has labored for years to prove this fact through a painstaking work of getting to the meaning of this Pauline theology of powers; he argues that Jesus’ approach to dealing with such

¹⁷⁹ Diane B. Stinton, *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 101.

evil powers was to name, unmask, and engage them in order to dislodge their stranglehold on their victims, however, non-violently.¹⁸⁰ In African Christianity today, all of these qualities are now valorized and assimilated into Jesus as the only one who carries them infinitely further in every ramification in the power of the Spirit, and hence, the healer and liberator par excellence, and the true giver or restorer of abundant life and wholeness wherever they have been diminished. One frequently hears, for instance, Nigerian Christians in their prayers address Jesus as: “*Dibia ka dibia*” meaning “the healer, the divine physician or medicine man who is greater than the ordinary medicine man because he is God;” or “*ogwo mgbe onyiri dibia*” meaning “He (Jesus) who cures the sickness that the medicine man or doctor is unable to cure.” In expressions like these, the image of the *dibia*, valorized and assimilated into Jesus truly functions in a meaningful way for African Christians in the very “substratum of vital Christian experience and consciousness.”¹⁸¹ While this basic African ancestral spiritual and mystical assumption functions meaningfully in African Christian experience, at the same time, some of those same Christians do not want to be associated with such words as *dibia*, *nganga*, medicine man, and so on. For such Christians, these words are linked to the devil, demons, the occult, juju, superstition, idolatry, syncretism, and so forth. These are Christians who have been influenced significantly and, of course, uncritically, either

¹⁸⁰ See Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Powers in the New Testament* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1984); idem, *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces that Determine Human Existence* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1986); idem, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1992); see also idem, *The Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium* (New York and London: Doubleday, 1998).

¹⁸¹ Bediako, “The Significance of Modern African Christianity,” 53.

by the domination of the languages of colonial and missionary Christianity or neo-Pentecostalism. History, however, testifies to the distortion and hostility of colonial regimes, Western anthropologists/ philosophers in their evolutionary thought, and missionary Christianity toward African traditional values. Everything, including traditional healing mechanisms, was dismissed as fetish, devilish, demonic, superstitious, idolatrous, black magic, and with an only option to discard it all. This colonial and missionary stance imposed a Manichean dualism that is strange to Etche/West African religious space which lacks any conception of the Devil as the arch-rival of the Supreme God. Rather, God's dynamic hierarchy and sovereignty is tolerant of the other spirits and divinities who share in his dispersed power for the wellbeing of humanity and cosmic harmony. It is therefore, not surprising that such African Christians who, unfortunately, are still held sway by the continued dominance of such colonial and missionary vocabularies and languages aimed at inferiorizing all that is African have continued to resent the need to come to terms with their own local memories/histories; and the dignity of difference, by a continual use of such words in those negative connotations. At any rate, the existence of numerous healing and deliverance Christian ministries and churches, Charismatic Renewals and priest-healers in West Africa today, speaks volumes about the living and vibrant faith experiences of African Christians with regard to the operation of mystical powers. All this is in realization that Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit is the one who has the overall power that conquers all evil, brings total healing, restores diminished lives, and ultimately brings salvation to all. This sustains the faith and hope of African Christians in their struggles in the face of suffering, exploitation, and oppression.

While it is important to acknowledge the interest aroused with regard to deepening theological reflection in this aspect of vital African Christian experience as a right step in the right direction, it is equally necessary to call for caution to watch out for the tendency to undue emphasis on faith healing and the reduction of the missions of Jesus and the Holy Spirit to the miraculous. It is the task of critical theological thinking and reflection to correct and purify such a tendency. What must be kept in mind is that miracles and the miraculous were only part of Jesus' overall mission of inaugurating the reign of God. Upon his announcement of the dawn of the reign of God, Jesus invited the people to *metanoia*, to turn away from sin and give their hearts to love of God and love of neighbor. Why change of heart? As Jesus says: "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" (Matt 15:19-20). It is these things that Apostle Paul calls the works of the flesh; murder, greed, theft, idolatry, dissension, exclusion, and so on. To indulge in them is to reject God and *koinonia* with fellow human beings. Thus, as one anointed and empowered by the Spirit, Jesus' mission entails not only getting to the root of sin and healing the human heart from the inside out, but also to prophetically confront the incarnations of sin in its manifold manifestations in dehumanizing and oppressive religio-cultural, socio-economic, and political structures and institutions. Hence, we can understand Jesus' predilection to stand in solidarity with the weak, the poor, the oppressed, the excluded, and those silenced and pushed to the margin and bottom of society in name of purity of tradition. It is in giving himself away completely for their sake and for daringly and prophetically speaking from a subaltern epistemic location outside the colonality of power when he should be silent, that Jesus runs into conflicts with the domination and totalizing system at his time which will lead

to his murder (martyrdom). But his death has validity for all humanity. Therefore, any treatment of holistic healing in the African Christian experience which appropriates and assimilates the sterling traditional qualities to Jesus but ignores this aspect of the socio-political structures that diminish life by inflicting crushing and unspeakable poverty to the vast majority of the people is not holistic.

It is not surprising that many Christians resort to faith healing and turn to the miraculous when they are sick because of grinding poverty and thus, their inability to afford health care costs which only the rich can get. What does one expect a number of poor African Christians living in many communities (rural, for example) with lack of functional hospitals, health centers, basic drugs, as is the case in Nigeria, to do when they are sick or in emergency? Many, not surprisingly, get sick because of poor living and sanitary conditions, overcrowding, lack of drains and sewers, lack of potable water, unemployment, illiteracy, poor nutrition, politically induced famine and hunger due to politically motivated socio-cultural and ethnoreligious conflicts, and so on.¹⁸² Meanwhile, the rich, politicians and the clerical class alike, often have the means to fly out to Europe, America, or Asia to get the best treatment when they are sick. Why do they not stay back in Nigerian and other African hospitals for treatment? They desire the best for themselves but not for the poor masses who are left to their fate. The political class has failed to utilize public funds to make basic institutions work in Nigeria. It is the mission of the church, as instrument for the Spirit to prophetically speak out and side with the poor in concrete commitments to hold leaders accountable and to overcome the root causes of

¹⁸² See Aylward Shorter and Joseph N. Njiru, *New Religious Movements in Africa* (Nairobi, Kenya: Pauline Publications, 2001), 90.

injustice. If there are demons to be exorcized, certainly, the greatest of them must be the powers that have incarnated themselves in religious, social, and political structures that diminish human life and dignity, deprive human rights, and preclude the actualization of people's destiny and potentials. Therefore, the life-giving and resistant Spirit calls the churches to show solidarity with the weak, the broken, the poor, and the traumatized, by following the vision of Jesus in preferentially opting for the poor and oppressed to restore their full humanity. In a particular way, this holistic liberation embraces the emancipation of women in Africa from exclusion and marginality, and giving them their rightful place in both church and society. To reduce the ministry of Jesus to faith healing, casting out demons, and to the miraculous is to simply turn Jesus into a *dues ex machina* (who does everything miraculously or even magically), and it is to shy away from dealing with and fighting to remove the structures that institutionalize and perpetuate poverty, oppression, misery, ignorance, and injustice.¹⁸³ Such a stance would also fail to empower the people to take control of their future, to struggle for their rights to decent living conditions, for their integral development, and human promotion. In the present state of the dislocation of Africa, the church must bear a prophetic witness in word and in praxis that Jesus is truly the Savior and liberator, and that God's Holy Spirit is frankly the Lord and Giver of life to African "men and women who live in situations close to death."¹⁸⁴ When all is said and done, the church must not forget, however, that the victory that Jesus has already won for us has an eschatological dimension. It is this eschatological hope that should

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Èla, *My Faith as an African*, 11.

sustain our struggle for an alternative, better, and just world. This way, the church will become instrumental in the social transformation and building of a new African society.

5.8 African Christian Theology in World Christianity: A Way Forward

Beyond Christendom, beyond Global Christianity/church, African Christian theology locates itself within the borders of World Christianity/church. Perhaps it might be helpful to establish a distinction between these concepts. Global Christianity implicates and embodies the faithful replication and transplantation of a particular epistemic and cultural framework as well as Christian forms and patterns as they are developed in Western Christianity to other parts of the world. It represents the view that Europe is Christianity and Christianity is Europe which was characteristic of the colonial missionary impulse. Global Christianity thus suggests: “that growing communities of professing Christians around the world...and...that churches everywhere are a religious expression of Europe’s political reach, or else a reaction to it.”¹⁸⁵

Understood in this sense, Global Christianity embodies the vestiges of Christendom which refers to when the church became a domain of the state as an imperial Christianity and a Christian empire with imperialistic propensities to enforced uniformity, universalism, and autarchic unilateralism. This is a clear case of the expression of the coloniality of power. World Christianity, unlike empire which operates on an ideology of unquestioning totalizing linearity that is intolerant to complexity, pluriversality, or the seemingly contradictory (which may not necessarily be false), suggests a framework or space that embodies diverse epistemic centers, pluriversal

¹⁸⁵ Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity?* 23.

macronarratives, a variety of faith expressions, and Christian forms and shapes, with local or indigenous characteristics. World Christianity displays a plurifocal cultural flow not only from the West to the rest (as in passive recipients) but also from the South to the North especially through migration facilitated by globalization process.¹⁸⁶ Accordingly, “‘World Christianity’ is the movement of Christianity as it takes form and shape in societies that previously were not Christian.... World Christianity is not one thing, but a variety of indigenous responses through more or less effective local idioms, but in any case without necessarily the European Enlightenment frame.”¹⁸⁷ Because World Christianity allows for the simultaneous existence of plurality of particular epistemic locations, local expressions and models of faith, indigenized Christian practices, as well as the inhabitation of multiple relationships, Sanneh is right on target when he asserts that “Indigenizing the faith meant decolonizing its theology, and membership of the fellowship implied home rule.”¹⁸⁸ Decolonizing our theology means that it must be a critical and reasoned reflection on the faith experience and confrontation with the divine in our geographical location and in the light of Scriptures but in such a way that its outcome is not limited to our space. That is to say, World Christianity is welcoming of equality-in-difference, diversity, and indeed, pluriversality in a way that enriches and enhances communion. It is against this background that African theology in World Christianity/church, emerges as a border thinking from the colonial wounds to foreground

¹⁸⁶ Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 15-6; see also Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994).

¹⁸⁷ Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity?* 22.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

and legitimate African silenced and subalternized epistemic potential in articulating Africans' faith experiences. This rearticulation of the African faith experiences should be given a hearing and no longer silenced. Nevertheless, one is not under any illusion that the colonality of power is still at work. But this must not stop the African churches from growing and transforming themselves in order to become a leaven to contribute to the transformation of the African society.

Above all, the whole question of pluriversality that enriches communion has been greatly endorsed by the 1994 Synod of Bishops for Africa which proposed the metaphor of the church as the family of God. The African Synod recognizes that "it is in the power of the Spirit of the same risen Jesus that we are built into the body of Christ, God's household, and participants in Christ (cf. Heb 3:1, 6, 14; 1 Cor 12:27; Col 1:18, 24) to become therefore, the one undivided family of God in the image of the Trinitarian Family."¹⁸⁹ The family of God is not strictly biological but mystical. To be sure, the early Christian community understood itself as the family of God. This adopted metaphor is aimed at introducing into ecclesial life such qualities of the African family as: "care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue, and trust."¹⁹⁰ In our church-family, we have the same blood (of Christ) coursing in our veins. And we are sisters and brothers because we have the same Mother (the church – the Spouse of Christ) and the same Father.¹⁹¹ In this new Trinitarian family, relationships transcend ethnic frontiers. Through the Holy Spirit who indwells all the baptized, members of the Family

¹⁸⁹ *African Synod of Bishops*, 1994, § 25.

¹⁹⁰ John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Exhortation, Ecclesia in Africa*, § 63.

¹⁹¹ Cyprian of Carthage, Letter 74:7, 2; see also Cyprian's *The Unity of the Catholic Church*, no. 6.

of God are mystically linked to one another and ontologically linked to God just as has been demonstrated in the Etche African relational notion of person. The Spirit of Jesus who reigns in this family bestows diverse gifts to each individual and to each community in the Christian commonwealth (à la Tertullian) for the upbuilding of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12; Rom 12:4-8). The metaphor of the church as the Family of God imaged on the Trinitarian Family underscores the need to promote mutuality, respect for otherness, solidarity, interdependence, and recognition of equality-in-difference. Genuine communion is only possible where the dignity of each is recognized and upheld. Hence the African synod avers:

Christ has come to restore the world to unity, a single human Family in the image of the Trinitarian family. We are the family of God.... It is for the Church-as-Family that the Father has taken the initiative in creation of Adam. It is the Church-as-Family which Christ, the New Adam and Heir to the nations, founded by the gift of his body and blood. It is the Church-as-Family which manifests to the world the Spirit, which the Son sent from the Father so that there should be communion among all.¹⁹²

Therefore, just as individuals are graced, all communities and local churches have also been graced by the Spirit of Christ with their particular gifts which they are to harness and be allowed to bring to the communion of churches. By and large, conceiving the church as the Family of God imaged on the Trinitarian Family provides a paradigm for living out the relationality engendered by the Spirit of Jesus Christ both within and beyond the Christian community. There is no gainsaying the fact that a self-reliant African church would serve as a leaven in the social transformation of the African society.

¹⁹² *African Synod of Bishops*, 1994, §§ 25, 24.

5.9 Conclusion

The burden of this chapter has been to construct an authentic African relational pneumatology. An understanding of the dimension of spirit experiences in West African world-views paved the way for us to gain new understandings of the Universal Holy Spirit. The relational Spirit empowers the African churches to become church in new ways that would be relevant and responsive to the genuine aspirations of the African people toward the realization of their full humanity and destinies. By attaining a more adult status, the African churches would become a leaven for the social transformation of Africa.

Conclusion

The purpose of this work has been to reinterpret the Third Article of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (381) which affirms the Holy Spirit as the “Lord and the Giver of Life” in the light of African context. The objective has been to recover the relational quality of the Spirit (as enshrined in the Scriptures) that has been lost sight of during the long sojourn of Christianity in the West. The consequences of the loss of the category of relationality particularly with regard to the question of differences are hard to overlook. Hence, in this work, I have tried to utilize relationality which is a core tenet of West African world-views as an interpretive framework to accomplish the task I set myself herein.

It has been amply demonstrated in this work that the making of the modern/colonial world system brought about the classification of the populations of the planet into essentialized categories on the basis of European local cultural, historical, and epistemological normativity. Whereas European humanity and historicity were viewed as the apex and norm of history and humanity, those who fall outside this norm, particularly Africans, had, according to this reasoning, to be colonized and enslaved as a way of bringing them the torch of civilization. In this very process, Africans were not only treated as subhuman and savage, but also exploited, oppressed, and their epistemic potential suppressed and silenced, discredited as unscientific, inadequate, trivial, and only worth discarding.

This explains why the overall goal of this work has been to utilize the category of relationality to reinterpret and reconceptualize the Spirit as the Creator and Sustainer of

differences in a way that allows or rather compels us to strive to live together in spite of our differences. The urgency of this challenge comes to the fore in the present circumstances of the ambivalence of globalization. The process of globalization, no doubt, has turned the world into a global neighborhood of interconnectedness, yet it is fraught with experiences of fragmentation and dislocation. Thus, the Creator Spirit is not only the Giver of life but also the defender of that life as the Prophetic Spirit.

It is in this sense that the Spirit anointed Jesus as the Messiah who defends the defenseless and speaks for the voiceless who are oppressed, exploited, subalternized, and silenced by the social and religious structures of his time. In doing this, Jesus embodied the hospitality and friendship of God toward the excluded by restoring their humanity and including them in the *koinonia* of God's kingdom. The reign of God which Jesus proclaimed necessarily entails a preferential option for the poor and the denunciation of the ways of the powers that be and the establishment. This stance, of course, brought him into conflicts with the status quo and eventually led to his death.

As in the case of Jesus, the church as the "flesh of Christ" (body of Christ) has equally been empowered by the relational Spirit to embody the hospitality of God to others, especially the poor, the oppressed, and the suppressed. However, from what we have x-rayed so far in this work, it is evident that the church fails in her weakness, in this mission of preaching the good news which entails liberating the oppressed, by sometimes colluding with oppressive powers and stifling the movement of the Spirit. Hence, the "Discussion of the Seventh Assembly" of the World Council of Church is *ad rem*: "In our world, the powerful dictate how things are to be, might is right and truth is determined by coercive force and violence. The churches, more often than not, seek to accommodate

themselves to the prevailing order out of concern for institutional survival.”¹ This is so true, that oftentimes, in a bid to preserve institutional survival, unity, and purity of tradition, absolutizing canons and interpretations have been imposed on all regardless of social locations, local contexts, histories, and epistemic frameworks and meaning making systems (at times with political force, as in Christendom). Sadly enough, such coloniality of power is still alive and well today in many aspects of the church’s life. What must never be eliminated from view is that Jesus never sacrificed human liberation in order to preserve unity or purity of tradition at all costs. This fact has been amply demonstrated in this work.

A recovery of the relational quality of the Holy Spirit has serious implications for the church and particularly for the African church as illustrated in Chapter 5.² In rearticulating an African Christian relational pneumatology, it allows us to gain new understandings of the person and work of the Holy Spirit and the implications for being church today. It challenges all absolutizing tendencies in our manner of theologizing and allows for the foregrounding and legitimizing of all subalternized and silenced epistemic potentials and loci as sites of divine revelation and encounter. Basically, relational pneumatology invites a recognition of the dignity of difference according to the manner of equality-in-difference. As Nigerian theologian, Theresa Okure puts it, there is need for: “A clearer awareness of the need for us to do a theology that is situated in life and is oriented towards the betterment of the quality of human life and environment. This is necessary if our theologizing is indeed to be at the service of the people of God and be

¹ Julio de Santa Ana et al., *The Political Economy of the Holy Spirit* (Geneva: WCC, 1990), 7.

² See Chapter 5, sec. 5.7: “African Relational Pneumatology: Ecclesiological Implications.”

authentically Christian.”³ Authentic Christian theology is, therefore, necessarily pluriversal and multilingual. As Kwesi Dickson underscores: “the various authentic reactions to the same faith could be a means of arriving at a...greater vision of the Christ who, in the final analysis, is too big for our theologies. The church universal must be one whose diverse tongues complement one another as they express the Lordship of Jesus Christ.”⁴ The time of the naïve attempt to suppress the wealth and variety of faith experiences and to reduce them to the regime of sameness or to supplant them with absolute abstract summaries as in the days of the *Summa* in the production of knowledge, is long over.

The need for authentic theologizing, therefore, calls for the decolonization of African Christian theology. This present work is a contribution toward an authentic African Christian theology as a heterogeneous discourse emanating from the wounds of coloniality while instrumentalizing border thinking. Out of the colonial difference through border thinking emerges authentic theology which should not be discounted but recognized as an enrichment of the church universal which always remains a communion of churches. Let me end with a quote from Mercy Amba Oduyoye: “We...are confronted with this fact: those who were for a long time content to be consumers of theology have begun to be producers of theology and it is Christian theology. They are

³ Theresa Okure, “A Theology for Social Transformation in the Nigerian Context,” *The Proceedings of The Catholic Theological Association of Nigeria (CATHAN) Conference* (Ibadan, Nigeria: 1992), 25.

⁴ Kwesi A. Dickson, *Theology in Africa* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1984), 6.

widening the panorama of symbols, heightening the color of issues, and demanding commitment and action.”⁵

⁵ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1986), 76.

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